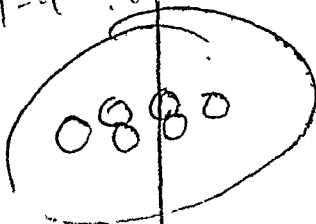


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Professor P. Lehardi who  
has been a constant host on  
each of my three visits  
to India. (Benares), (Bombay), (Aimer)  
1923, 1931, 1938  
Mrs Buch joins me in this greeting.  
THE GOLDEN THREAD

Edmund Buch.

March 1939

after our return.





# THE GOLDEN THREAD

*by*

Philo M. Buck, Jr.



*Decorations by*

NORMAN G. RUDOLPH

1931

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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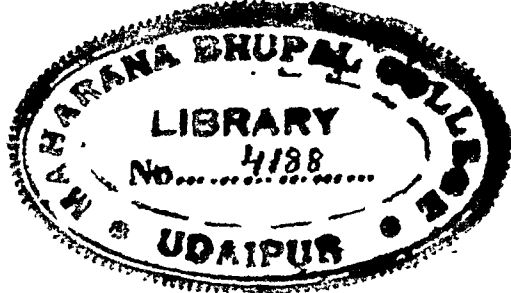
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TO ALETHEIA

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## PREFACE

"To some he is only a study in grammar," remarked Montaigne of one of his favorite authors whose books he found to be "the very anatomy of philosophy." Times have not altered. Caesar's battle orders, to a boy long ago, were a lesson in the use of the accusative and infinitive in indirect discourse, Dido a power-riveter to capture and clinch the vagaries of the Latin subjunctive, and Homer's Achilles a unique survival of the epic genitive. Is it not possible also that little boys in Athens took Homer's catalogue of the ships as a text-book in Greek geography and the Lotus Eaters as an essay in social anthropology? School-masters have a tradition as old, I fear, as that of literature, and its story is not always a romance.

Nor is a healthy imagination much aided if great literature is studied as a museum for poetic embroideries. One should build one's house, and with adequate walls and ceilings to keep out rain and frost, before one visits artists' studios for tapestries and pictures. Doubtless Homer chuckled with delight over the rightness of his 'rosy-fingered dawn,' and Virgil trembled before his own creature, that Cyclops, "*monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum*," for there is magic in the line that more than describes the horrid monster. The charm of poetic imagery—there is no wonder quite like it; and those had reason who would ascribe to it a supernatural potency. But to look only for these felicities is to substitute an easy

aesthetics for the main issue; such is the school-mistress' tradition, and its romance is lacking in dimension.

For great literature has ever been a search for a larger meaning in life as against the easy acceptance of life's routine and ready-made philosophies. Only in it may one readily discover the rich complexity of the living ideas that have made the tradition of humanity. Only it can reveal a rich and vital meaning for those quarrelsome words that ordinarily are as empty of significance as battle-cries or bludgeons—terms like optimism and pessimism, urbanity and nature, reason and instinct. It is there that the best search can be made for clues that may reveal all that is implied by character, moral discipline, and freedom. For in a manner far more vital than the speculation of philosopher or moralist, the vision of the poet discovers the stature of man and the secret of the good life.

Can a survey of this tradition of great literature be attempted, in a single volume, which shall tell the story of our chief heritage? Its pattern is far from simple, and its wise men come bearing gifts from the ends of the earth. The theme is fascinating, but its adequate interpreter must be a modern Briareus, with a hundred brains for the once hundred hands.

This attempt is more modest; but even within its arbitrary scope, now that the work is finished, the writer acknowledges his and its shortcomings. There is much left unsaid that he now wishes could have been said, and much said that might better have been left unsaid, or said more wisely. Each reader will be able to place a finger upon some manifest blemish. But the author's purpose was not to avoid the charge of being arbitrary and incomplete. If he has succeeded in a measure in revealing the charm and vitality of the humane tradition, with its com-

plexity and its power and renascent youth, he has done more than all he set out to do. It is in this hope that he now takes his farewell of a work that has been more than a labor of love.

Porquerolles en Iles d'Or, Var, France.

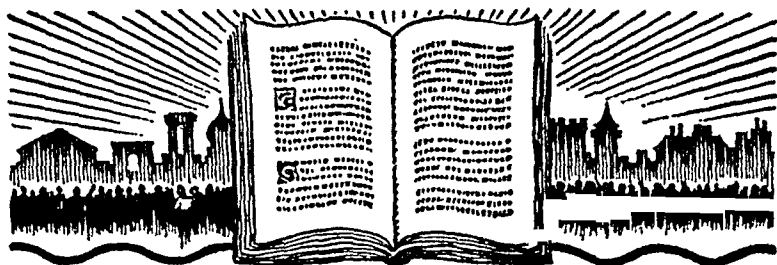


## CONTENTS

PREFACE	xiii
I. THE GOLDEN THREAD	1
II. BRIGHT PHOEBUS IN HIS STRENGTH— HOMER	15
I. The Matter of Troy	
II. The <i>Iliad</i>	
III. The <i>Odyssey</i>	
III. THE MYSTERY OF TEARS	63
I. The Theme	
II. Aeschylus	
III. Sophocles	
IV. Euripides	
IV. THE MYSTERY OF LAUGHTER— ARISTOPHANES	104
V. THE TRAGEDY OF EMPIRE	127
I. Rome	
II. Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i>	
VI. THE BANKRUPTCY OF PAGANISM	155
I. Socrates	
II. The Aftermath	
VII. KAMA, KARMA, AND NIRVANA	186
VIII. THE VOICE FROM THE WILDERNESS	212
I. The Hebrew Bible	
II. The Koran	
IX. THE TWO ETERNITIES	254
I. Monk and Knight	
II. Dante Alighieri	
X. THE DEATH OF ROMANCE	299
I. The New World	
II. <i>Don Quixote</i>	

XI. QUE SÇAIS-JE?—MONTAIGNE	336
XII. THE IRONICAL REPLY: SHAKESPEARE	369
XIII. THE MODERN GENTLEMAN—MOLIÈRE	402
XIV. THE PURITAN CONSCIENCE	431
XV. ROMANCE AND SCIENCE	465
I. The Romantic Protest	
II. Goethe	
XVI. LAST ISSUES	514
BIBLIOGRAPHY	539
INDEX	547

# THE GOLDEN THREAD



## I. THE GOLDEN THREAD

*"Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst."* GOETHE.

TRADITION in literature—the long and varied record of man's effort to communicate his hopes and aspirations, his disillusionments and tragedies, his struggles and triumphs, the endless and paradoxical motives which give life a meaning and value—to trace this from the beginnings, when man's ways were relatively simple, to these later and richer times, is to reconstruct in imagination the inner biography of the human race. It is a story that goes far beyond the boundaries of any race, language, or continent, and in its earlier chapters had little need of the artificial device of writing and books. Some of its most significant episodes were sung by persons who to history are nameless and whose private lives are beyond the disillusioning pen of the magpie biographer; and the tradition was hoary long before the art of printing made books and public libraries a responsibility and newspapers and popular magazines a public nuisance. Nor are the later chapters, of times after the charge of illiteracy became a moral reproach, any more significant or interesting than those composed when the arts were in their infancy and science yet unborn. A vital thing is this tradition, a golden thread uniting the present and the past, and its story a veritable romance.

But it can well be asked, how can a tradition be found in things so widely separated as the prehistoric past and the

changing present, or the contemplative Orient and the scientific and changing West? What general vital motives shall we find in literature that can leap mountain ranges, bridge oceans, and like the spirit of immortal youth come down across the centuries and millenniums, and weave themselves into the very texture of our practical and progressive ideas on man and his destiny to-day? If this be possible then surely there is a rich meaning in the chance phrase of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, "Humanity is always made up of more dead than living." It may be something of a shock—but a thoughtful mind must ever be ready for shocks—to learn that a much prized philosophy of life, which we fancied had been won by us after much effort and experience, had three thousand years ago been expressed more fitly by Achilles, the headstrong hero of Homer; or that a balm for hurt minds, a comfort that comes as a blessed inspiration in a moment of grief, had ages ago been found to have the same healing in its wings for the distracted hero of Valmiki's Sanscrit epic. In truth, and we humbly acknowledge it here, and in the chapters that follow illustrate by citation and context, this thing we call the tradition of literature is no whit different from the tradition of humanity; different in age, race, language, and aspect, and yet under a Protean shape and in a Babel-like confusion of tongues, the essential thing that lives, struggles, aspires, is exalted or crucified, in this our twentieth century of science and progress. We cannot deny our nature or our heritage; mankind, in spite of varied language and culture, is at heart one, is bound together by a chain of gold.

It is also true, on the other hand, that each author is a child of his own age. "The real literature of an epoch", wrote Renan, "is that which paints and expresses it." Nor is his contemporary and fellow-countryman, Taine, entirely

misleading when he attempts to account for an author's genius as due to a threefold cause, to the race to which he belongs, the particular epoch in which he lives with its peculiar flavor, and the special interest of the moment when he comes to write. Thus Shakespeare is obviously a child of the stirring days in England after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, when the English imagination for the first time in more than a hundred years discovered a new freedom and a new world in which to exercise its powers. Milton as obviously looks at life from a different angle and for a different purpose; and though as clearly English in his tradition and background, has new interests and new problems to occupy his imagination.

To understand a poet aright it is necessary then to have some sympathetic and imaginative knowledge of his times; not the accurate knowledge of an historian, but a responsive imagination that can call up, in part at least, a picture of the past and its motives for living. Without the vital conviction that the age of Homer is a living reality, as real as our own, one cannot read Homer with sympathetic understanding. The archeologist and the philologist may labor with spade and lexicon, and bring to light treasures of art and linguistics, and thus be able to restore in scientific fullness the details of the life and language of those people dead these three millenniums and more. We may see their cities, learn their mode of life, and their art and culture, restore their language, and know to a precise detail their ethnic origins and the secret of their sudden eclipse. But all these facts, if they remain no more than antiquarian facts, are of value only for the museum of knowledge. They must be quickened with life and understanding, so that we, in this far later epoch, may without difficulty translate ourselves in imagination into their background, make

their past a present for us, feel the urge of life somehow as they felt it, fit into a pattern the complex of facts the historian, archeologist, and philologist have supplied us, and thus live their experience somehow as they lived it—we must do all this before we can fully understand the poems of Homer.

I say fully, for this complete knowledge of the past can be reserved only for the specialist. But even the most meagre background of historical knowledge can go a ways in this imaginative excursion into the living record of the tradition of humanity that is great literature. For Homer, like any other great author of prose or poetry, carries much of his comment in his own pages. Better even than the archeologist or philologist, Homer in the scenes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, consciously or unconsciously, reconstructs the life of his own times. The very first lines of his poems begin the living panorama of men and manners and the ideas by which peoples are moved. These the reader, if to him be given the gift of sympathetic insight, can reconstruct into an adequate pattern. Homer was primarily telling a good story to an interested audience. But in the telling he permitted his hearers to reconstruct the fitting background for the story, otherwise it had lacked its full power. Though Greeks of the ninth century B.C. lived in a scene not essentially different from the one Homer reconstructs, and followed the story doubtless with more ease than can we, yet our task to-day is by no means a difficult one or one that should dismay even a relatively untrained reader.

Nor is the reason for this apparent paradox far to seek. Homer, Valmiki, Shakespeare, Milton composed under the limitations and inspiration each of his own age, and yet left poems that all ages have found acceptable, because human

nature, in spite of differences in age and background, has remained essentially the same. Rama, the hero of Valmiki's *Ramayana* in appearance and prowess may be a foreign and godlike creature with abilities to marshal powers and deal blows quite out of the range of human experience; but in his desolation when his wife Sita had been carried off by the monster demon Ravana, he is a compelling human figure as real in his grief as the most frail. Likewise Ravana, the villain of the epic, a monstrosity in form and power whom even the Greek gods would shrink from, so bizarre are his lineaments, has yet, like Zeus and Apollo, some human attributes and at the crisis of the story, after his son has been slain and he is going forth to certain destruction, is wistful in his tragic futility.

In this last poem we have poetical characters as different from the classical standards of orthodox Europe as anything that can be devised; yet even the most orthodox of later European epics have characters that for sheer unreality, so far as superficial lineaments go, are bold inventions. Dante in his picture of the damned revels in a region sown with figures that a modern imagination might well shrink from. The thief Vanni Fucci, begirt with serpents, raising his hands with an obscene gesture and blaspheming the Almighty; Ugolino frozen in the ice, yet bending over his mortal enemy and gnawing at the base of his skull; these are modes of torment and pictures of human degradation congenial to the Middle Ages perhaps, but beyond the power of any save the supreme artist to make humanly convincing. Likewise Milton, with his heroic figure of the arch-rebel and contriver of all evil, Satan, than whom no figure should be more repulsive—as the Puritan conceived him—has achieved the impossible; and made of him who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms



almost a tragic hero. And this feat is achieved by Dante and Milton by the simple device, unachievable except by genius, of making the characters universally human. It is this essential quality, ever presenting itself in new and compelling guise, and yet ever the same, that is the vital power of the tradition of great literature.

How different this from those lesser forms of letters that are concerned only with their own age. A poet-king in India, whose name only is known to us, wrote a long poetic drama in Sanscrit something over twelve hundred years ago. It dealt with the society of a little feudal state that long since has been forgotten, and even the names are as foreign to our ears as the formulas by which scientists obscure our commonest flowers. A thousand years before him Aristophanes, the Greek dramatist, wrote a comedy in which he pilloried some of the faults of an Athenian democracy engaged then in a pitiless war. The local allusions and the contemporary institutions in both these plays are things that require the assistance of specialists in history and philology. Yet translations of both of these plays (the *Little Clay Cart* and the *Lysistrata*), adapted slightly for purposes of our stage, were tremendously successful in twentieth century America.

Against these plays that rescue the tradition of human nature out of a social background long since dead, let us place two plays of almost our own times, Hauptmann's *Weavers* and Ibsen's *Doll's House*. Both are by dramatists of recognized ability who took Europe and America by storm, and both have made amazingly successful studies of almost contemporary problems. But both seem now to have had their day, and are read with something of the languid interest of yesterday's newspaper. For both are dated, they deal with problems that have a definite and possible

solution, and, except in stray corners of the world, a solution that has been found. No one is shocked now by Nora's obstreperous outbreak against a sequestered home and a husband who refuses to take her seriously. Husbands have learned a thing or two in fifty years. Nor is the lot of the poor Silesian weavers any longer the form that the age-old problem of capital and labor now assumes, and their plight has for us now only an antiquarian interest. The moral is easy to draw—these characters of the *Doll's House* and the *Weavers* are entirely expressed in the situations in which we find them, they nowhere rise above them and compel us to recognize their universal interest, as do the characters in the two comedies so many centuries their elder. When the interest in their situations flags, the characters, like the puppets in a Punch and Judy show whose strings are released, become suddenly dull and lifeless. The tradition of literature is not woven with such perishable materials.

It is not a static or unchanging tradition, the pattern it weaves is as variable as human nature itself, and its end no man can predict. In this it is like nature itself, subject to its own inner laws, and modifying itself constantly to meet every new occasion. Into this web are woven the buoyancy of the Homeric heroism, the rigid moral discipline of the Hebrew, the mystic transcendentalism of the Orient, the grim terror and ironic pity of Sophocles and Shakespeare, the humanism and mild scepticism of Montaigne, the romantic urge of Rousseau worshipping at its own shrine, the cultured balance and optimism of Goethe—the pattern is in truth a complex one, changing its texture with age and clime.

It is always full of the most unexpected surprises, and yet as one passes its long bead-roll in review, most genuinely

appropriate in its fitness to the demands and manifestations of human nature. In this again it is like living nature itself, ever modifying itself to new conditions and each modification unpredictable and most appropriate. There was a cosmic surprise, had there been a witness, on that day in the remote past when under appropriate conditions of light, warmth, and moisture the proper chemical ingredients gathered together to produce the living cell. A novelty, strange and utterly unpredictable, had appeared. A scientist with the appropriate equipment may trace the process backward and render an accurate account of all the varied elements that entered upon this marvelous cosmic adventure. But the process itself, the fact that such and such atoms and molecules, none of which separately or in the aggregate remotely resemble the novel creation, should under such and such conditions produce the suddenly dramatic result—this no scientific intelligence armed with any remotely conceivable instrument could predict. There was another episode in the story of living nature equally revolutionary in its significance, when on a certain day certain cells of living tissue, gathered together somehow in an aggregate which had certain curious organic relationships, exhibited the phenomenon we call consciousness. The physiologist and psychologist to-day with their refined instruments and technique can probe this faculty which nature sometimes has the habit of exhibiting. But who of them, even the most ingenious, could predict that out of such and such fortuitous confluences of old and recognized members would emerge something so utterly and amazingly new? The whole story of nature, the thing we call evolution in our carelessness, is the continuous account of just such fortuitous combinations or adaptations of well known materials which, when they come together, produce results

beyond the power of science to anticipate. Philosophers and scientists who have a way of giving a name to things beyond their understanding describe this mysteriously creative and unpredictable power of nature by the phrase "emergent evolution".

The story of the tradition of human thought is likewise filled with similarly unexpected meetings of old and familiar forces to create the startlingly new. The background of Homeric Greece, judged by our standards, was doubtless as drab in its petty realism as any lost fishing and pirate village in an undiscovered sea. There were, to be sure, the remains all about it of a preceding civilization that the invading Greek from the north had partly assimilated or laid waste. There were the flashes of light from the eastern and southern horizon that beckoned daring imaginations to explore the cultures of Asia Minor, Babylonia, Phoenicia and Egypt. There in the older cultures was true refinement and poetry to be discovered, for there they had a literate people, a settled community and the arts of peace. What of creative gift could there be among these restless Greeks, living between mountain and sea, their wealth, their sea-born commerce and their flocks and herds, and their pastimes piracy and war? But it was not Lydia or Phoenicia, or Egypt or Babylonia, that was to produce the world poet. That peculiar soil in which genius was to discover itself, that fortuitous combination of circumstances and genius was to come to the hitherto unmentioned Greeks. So came Homer utterly unpredictable into a Greek world ready to receive him, a cosmic surprise. And we living after, can trace backward and pronounce on the utter appropriateness of his coming.

Similarly the England of Shakespeare's youth held little of promise. About the time the future dramatist came to

London, a runaway from respectability in his home town, Sir Philip Sidney, a poet himself, in his *Defence of Poesy* was in despair over the future of poetry in England for "poets are almost in as good reputation as the mountebanks at Venice". Poetry is followed only by "base men with servile wits". It is true that the country was at peace and rapidly growing prosperous. There were stirrings in the universities and a few faint voices had been raised in unmistakable song. But it was to France and Italy, above all Italy, to which all lovers of art in England were then turning. The only things that had been admirably done in a hundred years had been in imitation of the masters across the Channel or the Alps. It was even seriously doubted that the English language itself was fitted for poetic exercise or the English temperament, in spite of the example of Chaucer, for its inspiration. Even Sir Philip Sidney, though he spoke encouragingly of the power of the English language, in his own converse with the muse used the manner of the earlier Italians.

Then came Shakespeare, unheralded. So amazing and unexpected was this visitation of genius and in so unexpected a corner of the world, that it took continental Europe nearly two hundred years to recognize the prodigy, the prophet out of Nazareth. As a critic and historian surveys the scene from the advantage of these later days, he can readily enough recognize the singular appropriateness of the unexpected visitation. It is possible to point out in detail the various influences that went to form his background, and perhaps supplied the clue. But the age of Elizabeth would have been satisfied with a Marlowe, Chapman, and Spenser, indeed would have been proud to decorate them, and the chief jewel of the crown would never have been missed, had it not been forthcoming, just as the Homeric age would

have remained satisfied with the miscellaneous and now long forgotten songs of Troy, had a Homer not appeared to give them immortality in his epics. Much nearer to the truth is it to say that Shakespeare made for us the age of Elizabeth, than that the age produced Shakespeare, for the unpredictable something new, that entered when chance chemical substances united to create life, also entered here, and the best name that may be discovered for it is genius. It is the story of unpredictable genius appearing in its own time and place, sometimes in regions apparently most unpromising, and giving a new turn to the experience and ideas of men, that lends to the tradition of literature its romance.

It also lends to it its value. For though Homer and Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe, Cervantes and Tolstoi composed their epics, dramas, or novels to hold the interest and stimulate the imaginations of their auditors or readers, behind the interest of the story or the compelling charm of the characters there lies a very genuine and vital philosophy of life. It is these philosophies, not abstract and cold as they come to us from synthetic philosophers, but concrete and warm as they come from the very experience of poet or novelist, these ideas on the meaning and value of life, that lend to their work the highest and final significance. It is these experiences as we re-live them when we read that quicken our own understanding and sympathy, and give a breadth of horizon that our lives, otherwise cramped, could never achieve.

Too easy is it to regard literature merely as a form of harmless entertainment, a kind of pastime that frees us for a moment from the dull monotony of our daily lives. And as a relaxation that interrupts the earnestness of living, it doubtless has a large recreative value. No one could find

a large zest in life were it so perfectly set to business routine, day and night, as the economy of an ant-hill, with not a moment for the profitless interruption of mere aimless enjoyment. But this is to put the value of literature not much higher than that of a picnic or circus; and somehow great literature at least instinctively refuses to take itself thus lightly.

With reason. The ideas in great literature mean something far more than a genial diversion. To most of us life offers few opportunities for much more than the commonplace—the little round of love and adventure and business that bounds the petty realm we call our own. Drab it must be in the main and often not more spontaneous than the spinning cog in a huge machine. How seldom may one unaided catch glimpses of distant horizons or feel the urge of strange adventure or meet personalities larger than one's own. Restless perhaps in youth with the desire to explore distant and larger experience, long before age begins to dim the eye or slacken the pulse, one touches the inevitable, and like Faust learns that life is a perpetual renunciation of fruitless desire. What are the heights and depths of human potentiality to us who must provide and lay up against sickness and old age? Nor is the easy philosophy of life that most men live by an unbeautiful thing. For what a chaos this world would be, and what an impractical affair life would be, if, one and all, the good easy men of a time were to wander off from home and fireside to explore the adventures of an Achilles, a Hamlet, a Don Quixote or an Anna Karenina! Our easy philosophy is a protective device framed by centuries of habit to dissuade us from acts that would be our undoing.

But though we may not, and should not in person em-

imagination, in great literature. There are to-day perhaps no Troys to conquer. "The face that launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilion," may not in person be for our attainment; but its charm and intoxication has held the poet's imagination from Homer to Goethe, and through them is also ours—if but the imagination be ours. The mournful queen Dido whom the piety of Aeneas left a tragic offering on the funeral pyre of Carthage, may be ours as she was the achievement of the poetic imagination of Virgil. The supernal journey of Dante through infernal and celestial regions, wherein human nature was revealed as never before or since to poet ancient or modern, may also be ours, if we have wings for the flight. The crazed and yet inspired reformer, Don Quixote, mounted on a sorry nag and accompanied by sodden and earthly incompetence, setting forth single-handed to wrest the hand of injustice, may be a personality within our scope, if we have the appropriate laughter and tears. Othello, "perplexed in the extreme", Lear, "more sinned against than sinning", Hamlet, "ill about the heart"—all these and many more we may compass with the author, and yet remain within the four walls of twentieth century comfort and security, if to us is granted the gift of gifts, the power to undertake the great adventure.

There is yet more in this adventure into the romance of tradition. Each of these authors during the adventure won after no common conflict a certain new and valuable attitude toward life. Achilles, Aeneas, Dante, Lear, Hamlet, Anna Karenina, Don Quixote, each fought the fight against certain odds and emerged, in victory or defeat, with at least one trophy, a sense of the meaning of life and of man's place in the world, which else would never have been attained. For by the inexorable law of nature it is



only by a struggle with unequal forces that we learn the deeper secrets of human nature and its powers and destiny. These I have called the authors' philosophies of life. How much more significant they are than the commonplace and comfortable maxims by which men live, when they live unadventurously, a glance will make obvious. But by following in the footsteps of the tradition, by seeing the world as Homer or Shakespeare, Dante or Goethe, saw it, we add to our accumulating account the experience also of these men, and our lives are thereby made the richer. To no single experience, be it never so rich, are the richest and most complex depths of human nature revealed. To see its fullest powers, and to catch its ripest wisdom, one must tarry long over the experience of the human race as it has been revealed, not in history, but in the imagination of poets and adventurers. Here best we see the vast panorama, the thing that is human nature, gradually unfolded before our eyes and in our own sympathetic experience. This in reality is the romance of tradition.

One thing more. It is this tradition that has made humanity what it is. Shelley, a poet himself, once wrote: "It exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world" if the poets "had never been born." The sentence is not an idle remark, for without them we should never have completely discovered ourselves. In this sense the tradition of humanity is no dead thing, but a living, woven like a golden thread into the texture of our present life and institutions. These ideas, that have made humanity, from whatsoever source they may come, enter at last into a common stream, and each moment of the present is an inheritor of the contributions of the past. Indeed in them the past and the present merge and share a common life.



## II. BRIGHT PHOEBUS IN HIS STRENGTH

HOMER

### I. THE MATTER OF TROY

"O brothers, who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the West, to this so brief vigil of your senses which remains wish not to deny the experience, following the Sun. Consider your origin; ye were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge." DANTE.

FROM the first faint glow in the east and the paling of the stars before the dawn to the full radiance of the new sun, there is no moment we may confidently set apart as the beginning of day. So though we may push our inquiry curiously into the earliest traces of literature or history, we discover no poet or poem or spoken word that will mark for us the beginnings of poetry. There were poets long before Homer, as there were deeds to be chronicled long before the war against Troy; and their songs, on the mainland of Greece, the islands of the Aegean, and the coast of Asia Minor, may for centuries have maintained a sacred tradition. Then came Homer, and in the poems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* he worked the materials of his predecessors and the themes of war and hate and love and adventure into a pattern whose issues are of life and death and the lot of common humanity. With Homer great literature first

found its supreme theme and man became completely articulate.

It is fortunate indeed and rare for any people to have in their history a deed of self-devotion to some cause greater than they, which in the years to come will be a stimulus to the imagination and a symbol of their pride. Most peoples never attain to this aristocratic distinction. But Greece had two such cosmic events in its history—incidents of such world-significance that the most forlorn of the inhabitants of Hellas felt himself immeasurably superior in every human respect to the rest of the barbarian world. These were the pre-historic invasion by all Greece of Asia and the destruction of Asiatic Troy, and the parrying of Asia's return thrust by the despots Darius and Xerxes in the glorious battles of Marathon and Salamis. The imaginative presence of the first, tinged by all the colors of a mythical and heroic past, gave Homer his theme; in the historical consequence of the second, Athens found the opportunity for empire in commerce and industry as well as in art, poetry, philosophy, and science. And there was something in the nature of the Greek that made him quick to perceive the significance of the gift.

Who was the Greek? The Roman satirist, Juvenal, passes a compliment even when holding him up as an object of contempt to the downright and virtuous Roman man of affairs:

"What's this that's now dragged in?  
Grammarian, orator, geometer, painter, masseur,  
Auger, rope dancer, doctor, mage; jack of all trades,  
This starveling Greek: bid him, and to heaven he'll climb."

The ancient Greek was frankly a puzzle to his contemporaries—like his rival the Hebrew—an object of ad-

miration or contempt, never sinking to the world of the professional commonplace. He was as successful in business as in art, a confirmed wanderer, and yet a confirmed lover of his own country and institutions. He was all eyes and ears, with a ready tongue to set forth his adventures. Intellectually the wonder of the world, exploring with relentless curiosity every possible realm of human knowledge; politically, though brilliant, never able to overcome his instinctive abhorrence of empire and despotism, and a helpless prey—save on the two brilliant occasions—of the aggressive invader. It is hardly to be wondered at that to the plain common sense of Juvenal his later descendants should appear light-minded, and light-tongued.

The Greeks were doubly fortunate in their choice of a home—fortunate in its geography, and fortunate in those whom they forcibly displaced and whose rich inheritance they were privileged to make their own. For the mainland of Greece and the islands of the Aegean, including Crete, were a bridge between the culture of Asia and awakening Europe. The people who occupied these regions would be compelled in spite of themselves to use their imaginations as well as their arms. And they might, if their powers were sufficient, grow rich by the trade that went by their doors. To this restless life of adventure, they were relentlessly driven also by the very poverty of their soil. Greece is rich neither in mineral nor in agricultural resources. To the inhabitant whose inertness forbade his looking across the sea, it could furnish little more than a prospect of barren hillsides and scant valleys, whose richest treasure might be an intrepid flock of goats and a few half-wild swine. But this very indigence of an inhospitable country was the Greek's richest opportunity, and he quickly seized upon his heritage, and prospered uniquely.

The small valleys, cut off from each other by ragged mountains, became the homes of a multitude of city states. Here and on the rocky islands, and on the river mouths of Asia Minor grew up these autonomous, freedom-loving, and in the main democratic peoples, speaking closely allied dialects and coming into frequent contact in war or trade, the ancestors of the classical Greeks. Their very poverty was the cause of their resourceful alertness, as was that of the Scot of later history. Their strategic aloofness and their distrust of the homeless stranger, in little cities where citizenship was almost a family bond, and their popular assemblies, not unlike meetings of a social club, gave the large idea of democratic institutions and a love of freedom. The first necessity of making a living gave them a certain amateurish delight in exploring every possible avenue of human achievement and the mental agility and suppleness which Juvenal derided. It was the answer of the Greek to the challenge of life itself. To fail in the test meant starvation or servitude. Life to such a people was a perpetual adventure against heavy odds, for nature played them with loaded dice, and they must ever be alert to meet her faithlessness with equal cunning. The resourcefulness of Ulysses is more than a symbol of a philosophy of life—the *esuriens Graeculus*.

The long sunshiny days of the Greek summer, and the geniality even of the Greek winter also left their indelible trace on the poetry, science, art, and speculation of the Greek imagination. It is an imagination purged of obscurity like his landscape, and demanding to set forth its thought and pictures in firm lines and perfect perspective. It will see clearly even when it deals with abstract thought, and its pictures of the processes of nature will have the downright convincingness of a logical syllogism. It was

not by accident that the Greek became the father of later art, science, and philosophy.

The Greeks were fortunate, too, in those whom they had displaced on the mainland and the islands of the Aegean. For their home had been built for them before they took possession, and amply furnished likewise. Long before the Greeks invaded the peninsula, driven from the north by the restless migrations of tribes beyond the Danube, the coast cities, Mycenae, Troezen, Argos, and the islands, especially Crete, had been occupied by a flourishing, sea-going people, the Aegeans we call them, of whose parentage and language we know precisely nothing, but whose attainments in the arts, peaceful and military, fill us yet with amazement. What must have been the surprise of these early Greek invaders from the rude forests of the Danube when they beheld for the first time the sea-going ships, the elaborate citadels, the carvings and gold work, and above all, the settled civic life and the comforts of civilization. They came in two waves: <sup>1</sup> one across the Dardanelles and filtering down the coast of Asia Minor and the Asiatic islands of the Aegean; the other, the one that interests us now, down the west coast of Greece, through

<sup>1</sup> The author begs the reader's forbearance. Sometimes a footnote is necessary to avoid a misunderstanding; sometimes it is an opportunity to exploit the writer's erudition. This opportunity I shall unhesitatingly ignore. But here a word of caution is in place. The theory outlined below about the Achaeans and Trojans *may not* be in accordance with the facts of sober history. There is some evidence to support it. It has the approval of some first-rate Homeric scholars, and is also contradicted by some. The linguistic specialists discount the historical and archeological specialists, and both turn upon the literary critic. I have followed the "English School" that speaks with Professor Leaf; his theory of the Achaean settlement of Greece and the Trojan war is good enough to be true; and after all has no bearing in the slightest on the value of Homer's poetry as poetry and a revelation of the human problem. For had there been an accurate historian, with the scientist's preoccupation, on hand to write an account of the World War of the twelfth century B.C. there would have been no Homer to compose its tragic epic. Its farewell to arms would have been as commonplace as some now recorded after a similar world catastrophe.

Epirus and to the Peloponnese, and from there to the islands, occupying the old cities, setting up a feudal aristocracy, with the old Aegeans in subjection as serfs or artisans. These were the Achaeans—a name we shall meet again—and their coming was not far from the year 1500 B.C. What became of the cultured first inhabitants is again a question with little hope of an answer. We shall meet a few of the evicted and dispersed victims of this conquest on the edge of Palestine—a thorn in the flesh of the early Israelite; and one of their heroes, Goliath of Gath, the Philistine, is to serve as a foil to the young hero, David. There is this connection at least between Homer and the Hebrew.

It is these, the Achaean invaders, who are the Greeks of Homer; and the civilization he describes of Troy, of Mycenae, of Ithaca, of Phaeacia, is that of about the year 1200 B.C. when this new feudal aristocracy had finally absorbed the best of the older culture, and was now embarked on its career of conquest. They were now no longer a primitive people, and theirs by no means a primitive culture, and their poet, though he lived at least two hundred years later and came of another tribe and dialect, was by no means a primitive poet. The new Greece had had nearly a half millennium, since it left its northern woods and rivers, to adapt itself to its new home and to perfect the new and humane tradition.

The war against Troy was an historical fact. Troy is an historical fact which the spade has uncovered until we can recognize the outlines of the palace of Priam. The rape of Helen by Paris may also be an historical fact, but the whole motive for the war must have been something less romantic. It was doubtless not much more than a desire of the Achaeans to extend their feudal empire and gain con-

trol of the Asiatic trading depots, established by another wave of Thracian invaders, and to these Troy was the strategic clue. It was the first time that all Greece had united against a common foe. The war was a long and costly one—Homer says ten years—and the issue a complete victory. But a victory for which the Achaeans were to pay a terrible price; for it weakened them before the next invader, and the magnificent enterprise was to live unrepeatd for more than a half-millennium, until a new danger was again to arm all Greece against the vengeance of Asia.

It is not surprising that an event of such magnitude should find an adequate poet, but it is startling that it should call forth one with the rank and power of Homer. For into the story of a forgotten war, Homer has read something vastly more significant than a tale of war and bloodshed. In his panorama of heroes, and heroines, Homer puts motives more compelling and far more intimately human than the claims of any war or the vengeance of any outraged city might seem to require. Like the modern scientist before the apparent simplicity of the atom, he attacks his theme only to discover a universe. It is a story of tragedy and yet of faith in human nature; of destiny and yet an assertion of human freedom; of the glory of war and its awful futility; of heroism and self-sacrifice and disillusionment and grief; of private revenge and the vanity of human wishes; of the lust of adventure and the charm of home and fireside; of the claims of love and the charred cinders of passion. This is Homer and what he discovered in the matter of Troy.

The story of Troy, as it has come down to us from Homer and others, is dramatic enough and as full of human interest as any. The incidents stretch over a period of more than twenty years, and for their full significance, go back to the



founding of Troy by King Laomedon, and his treachery to the gods who aided him in rearing the miraculous walls of the city. For he had bought the aid of Hercules and Poseidon with the promise of a span of immortal horses. But he paid in horses of mortal breed; and Troy, Homer never lets us forget, had thereby incurred an immortal wrath, and gained a reputation for double dealing that even the justice of King Priam was never able to live down.

The next set of enmities the city was to arouse was purely human. On the birth of Paris to Priam and Hecuba the oracles foretold the sinister fate the boy was to bring to city and family. In consequence he was exposed, as was then the custom for undesired infants, in the forests of Mount Ida. There he was found by shepherds—a beautiful youth who for his attractiveness was drawn as judge in a celestial trial of beauty in which the claimants of the prize were no less than Hera, the wife of Zeus himself and queen of the gods, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. Paris was indiscreet and young, and bribed by the promise of the most beautiful woman in the world, he adjudged the prize to the least worthy of the three, but the most charming. The next we hear of him, he is back in his home recognized by his parents, his ominous future now forgotten.

His next step is even more heedless. He is a guest in the palace of King Menelaus of Argos. Now Menelaus is brother of Agamemnon, the supreme king of the Achæan chieftains, and the newly wedded husband of the lady Helen, the daughter of Zeus. When the curtain next rises she is with the romantic adventurer and being received by his fellow citizens in Troy. All is commonplace and human enough—we must not forget that we are back in a day before divorce courts, when woman-running was a game

with no closed season. But Paris' crime was a serious one, for under the heavy obligation of the laws of hospitality, more binding in a day before modern travel and security, he had raped a king's most royal treasure. And thus at the beginnings of great literature, Homer sees in the romance of princes and the tragedies of cities the age-old motive of the waywardness of youth and the indiscretion of passion.

The soundness of the Homeric imagination, however, is never better shown than in the manner in which he insists on seeing this question in its true perspective, with all the complex of motives that make up the pattern of life. Modern writers have played in imagination with the figure of the *Ewig-Weibliche*, Helen of Troy. But none, no not even Goethe, has quite caught the richness of the "face that launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilion". For Homer she is not what "in the ways of a thousand years men have come to desire". This romantic malady, where sex becomes an obsession and the motive for tragedy, was not Homer's. A thousand years must roll by and man have more leisure for introspection and image creation before the love of Helen can become the single clue to the war of city against city. With Homer it is the much larger question of human justice and outraged sovereignty; but the fact that Helen was the victim, or the cause, of Paris' and then Troy's treachery is never quite lost sight of in the full telling of the story.

The rest of the legend is well known—the assemblage of the huge armaments under the chieftains, Achilles, Ajax, Ulysses, and over them all Agamemnon—the nine years of weary siege, now dragging into the tenth. The final dramatic events that led to the catastrophe, the wrath of Achilles, the defeat of the Greeks, the death of his friend, Patroclus, the return of Achilles; the death of Hector;

the death at last of Achilles at the hands of the treacherous Paris in the days of a truce when he was suing for the hand of Polyxena, the virgin daughter of Priam, and peace; the death of Paris, a lingering death full of remorse and the return of his first love Oenone, the nymph; the craft of Ulysses; the wooden horse, and the last night of horror, fire and bloodshed—all these are of the stuff out of which may be woven the finest tapestries of romance. And all of them were fresh to the hand of Homer. Then finally after the slaughter, when the trophies had been gathered, funerals attended to, and captured women distributed, Helen to her outraged husband, there is the departure of what was left of the mighty armament to its home—a journey that was to be a sad one for many of the heroes. Agamemnon was to return only to be slaughtered like an ox by his resentful wife, Ajax was to perish miserably at the moment of embarkation, and Ulysses was to float over the cosmic universe in a ten years' journey before he was to see home and fireside again—alone, after incredible perils, to face the last and greatest. All these materials for epics Homer knew likewise, and had he been an Ariosto or a Spenser, he would have tried the impossible and like them have failed.

But Homer was Homer, and a Greek. He knew the limitations of an epic poem, and he knew plot. So he selected in his *Iliad* not the war, but one incident of the war—the most dramatic and critical of the whole series of events, an incident likewise that could be condensed into the narrow compass of less than a week—a week out of ten years! In the *Odyssey* he is as economical—ten years' wandering, yet the space of the story is less than a month. And for his main characters he selects those who for the war and the return were the most obviously valuable—Achilles, the most impetuous and the most complex of the Greeks;

Hector, the pride of Troy, the most knightly of all; and Ulysses, the subtle, the gentleman, and yet the shrewd dodger of a fate that always was set to waylay him.

Homer was a Greek, not an Asiatic, though doubtless his life, or a large portion of it, was passed as minstrel at the court of some Greek knight in Asia. Yet he never lets his sympathy for the Greek cause distort his clear view of both parties to the conflict before Troy. Unlike the poets of India who similarly adopt the theme of war and conquest, to him the foe is always decent and heroic, human nature is always human nature, whether Achæan or Phrygian; and it is only as we follow the plot to its bitter end that we discover from manifest evidence that the Greeks deserved the victory. They were not the darlings of heaven, nor the recipients of supernatural powers, nor the possessors of super-human weapons, nor braver or more chivalric. They had, rather, the one quality which is always one ingredient in the recipe for military success. They understood military discipline.

The same objective clearness distinguishes the career of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*. Though he is beset by incredible dangers and involved with personages of far superior strength, he is sustained in his adventures by no special mandate of heaven and cherished by no supernatural aids. His success is always due to his foresight and intellectual cunning. He is equipped for success like any successful promoter. Yet the supernatural does play a prominent part in the poems. The plots reek with the fragrance of sacrifices; the heroes never miss an opportunity for a liturgical feast. They will interrupt a battle or a duel that they may slay an unblemished sheep or an ox that has never known the yoke, in order that they may look into the future and determine the will of heaven. Gods and goddesses stalk

the plains of Troy, or sit like greedy spectators on the heights of Olympus or Ida, gazing with breathless interest on the issues of the battle. They will quarrel with each other like children over their favorites, and even on occasion arm themselves and take part in the conflict, pulling out of the mêlée the hard-pressed or the wounded, or in a mist carrying off a favorite warrior from certain death at the hands of his enemies. If one listens too attentively to these noisy demonstrations by the Olympians, it is difficult at times to catch the clear human note that sounds like a call from the poem's beginning to the end. But to read the poems as examples first and last of the agency of the gods in human affairs and to see Fate as an inescapable destiny beyond the scope of mortal understanding, is to miss the finest thing in Homer. If man is no more than the toy of reckless deity, which it may cherish or destroy with impulsive indifference, if this be the moral of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, then Homer is a blasphemer of both gods and men and his poem of no more present day significance than the buried escarpments of Priam's palace, and over the story of past fragrance we might well exclaim: "Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?"

On the contrary, there is nothing in the poem so clear as the motives and powers of divinity, except the motives and powers of humanity. Gods are created in order that there may be men, and men likewise that there may be gods. The human and the divine are complements of each other, and yet also curiously share each other's attributes. The gods have no interest other than in men; and men should likewise center their interest upon the gods. The divine-human or the human-divine, it makes little difference which, except for implications of immortality which, alas, humanity has only in a limited measure. Such is

Homer's thought of the relation between the supernatural and the natural—it is all natural, with some of the natural possessing a larger aristocratic perfection, and this is the essence of divinity.

In all these stories, as the Greek wove the pattern of the web of human life, the supernatural is not much more than the fringe of the tissue. Human gods and divine men, clear and distinct like Greek art, with the motives and manners of greatness and pettiness, of humor and tragedy. Such is the theme and the scope of the poems of Homer.

In presenting the story Homer achieved for the first time in world literature the secret of plot. To be sure, the art of the bard made it necessary that the poems have subdivisions each complete in itself, one episode for one recitation. In this way the plot is arrested at the conclusion of an episode, a new episode is introduced with an appropriate explanation and completed, and then the story resumed again with a link that would be quite unnecessary if the poem were to be read as a whole. But this division of the plot into "rhapsodies", though it may seem somewhat crude to us who read, was necessary in a day of bards and oral entertainment.

And Homer—has he drawn for us his own picture, as some have fancied, in this loving tribute to the minstrel?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Is it necessary to remind the discerning reader that the name Homer may be as mythical as that of Achilles or Hector? There are those who have thought of the poet as a self-evolving poetic tradition. Others would separate the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, assigning each to a separate poet. Will some anthropologist or psychologist please assign a date for the ceasing of miracles. Recent scholarship is convinced on evidence of the unity of Homer. But to us this quarrel between the single authorship protagonists and the multiple authorship protagonists has only a remote interest, not much greater than the question of which city gave Homer birth. There are the poems; they differ in quality no more than *Lear* and *As You Like It*—not as much—or *Paradise Lost* and *L'Allegro*. We have them. Some episodes perhaps were inserted by later hands. But how does the Homeric problem touch the quality of the two epics? Even the question of date need not alarm the lover of Homer or his poetry.

"Then the henchmen drew near, leading with him the beloved minstrel, whom the muse loved dearly, and she gave him both good and evil; of his sight she reft him, but granted him sweet song."

## II. THE ILIAD

"These issues lie on the laps of the gods. I too will cast my spear. The rest shall the gods decide." *Iliad*.

The story of the *Iliad* is in essence a tragedy, as that of the *Odyssey* is a romantic comedy. It is the tenth year of the siege, and all of the warriors now are living on the edge of their nerves. Suddenly a plague breaks out in the camp, attacking both men and the commissary animals. Now in this day and for many a century after, a plague was a visitation of Providence for sins; and a council is called and the advice of Calchas, the seer, is taken. He puts the blame without hesitation. Agamemnon has sinned in holding against her will Chryseis, the daughter of the priest of Apollo; and the god in revenge is smiting with his poisoned arrows the guilty host. She must be returned forthwith and with becoming honor.

Agamemnon is angered. For the girl is beautiful, the division of spoils gave her to him, and the soldier's lot at best is a hard one. But he will let her go, if . . . Instantly Achilles, a free-tongued warrior, conscious of his freedom and worth, falls upon the king with reproaches. Agamemnon, to bring the smouldering quarrel to a hot fire, bluntly asserts his authority, claims Briseis, the captive maid of Achilles. For a moment it looks like murder and a leaderless host. But Achilles angrily submits, gives up the girl, and in a fog of petulance goes off to the seaside to bemoan his fate and to summon his goddess mother to make good his blind revenge. He will retire from the fight, the Greeks may go to the devil so far as he is concerned,

and will she do the decent thing by her son and have Zeus give victory to the Trojans, so that Agamemnon and the rest of the girl stealers may know how deeply he has been insulted and what a warrior they have lost. But again—mark the words—Achilles is not in love with the fair-cheeked maid, at least not to distraction. It is his pride that has been hurt, and his sense of importance, his self-respect, and before the whole host. He, the darling of the army and chief without peer—he has been put in his place by a man whose only claims to precedence were the four stars he wore on his shoulder. He seeks vindication, but in what a manner!

The rest of the story is the chain of events that follow this blaze of wrath. The Trojans under Hector, so soon as they note the absence of Achilles, swarm down on the now weakened Greeks and slowly drive them backward to the ramparts they had erected to protect their ships. The ramparts are scaled and destroyed, and under the dauntless Hector, the Trojans begin their attacks even on the ships. One by one the Greek heroes are wounded and retire from the fight, until only Ajax is left, like a lion at bay, on the deck of his ship, thrusting, parrying, and praying his father Zeus for light that they may die, if die they must, seeing at least the foe that smites them.

“O father Zeus, deliver thou the sons of the Achaeans from the darkness, and make clear sky and vouchsafe sight unto our eyes. In the light be it that thou slay us, since it is thy good pleasure that we die.”

In their agony the Greeks send an embassy to Achilles praying him to return, with the promise of a garden of fair-cheeked Briseises and a shipload of treasure. He is still adamant. But his companion Patroclus can bear the strain no longer. He has no private grief, and the death of his



again successfully; and he never is guilty of the other and common vice of drawing his heroes into the clouds. He even allowed himself to forget that the divine Achilles was invulnerable except in the heel, else where had been the suspense in the last stand of the unendowed Hector? No, the god-like Achilles is human like the equally god-like Hector, only he is a bit more resourceful with his weapons.

Yet Homer is a deeply religious poet, though his religion has been purged of all mysticism. At times it may be given us to doubt if he took his gods seriously. They are only too often exaggerated human beings without the human need to justify their lives. Immortality is theirs and it brings no responsibility to make the years count in worthy enterprise; to them and not to man has it been given to live forever and in ease and dalliance. Man, on the other hand, with his few days, has a concentrated responsibility to win self-respect and rouse emulation.

"Glaukos, wherefore have we twain the chiefest honour,—seats of honour, and messes, and full cups in Lykia, and all men look on us as gods? And wherefore hold we a great demesne by the banks of Xanthos, a fair demesne of orchard-land, and wheat-bearing tilth? Therefore now it behoveth us to take our stand in the first rank of the Lykians, and encounter fiery battle, that certain of the well-corsleted Lykians may say, 'Verily our kings that rule Lykia be no inglorious men, they that eat fat sheep, and drink the choice wine honey-sweet: nay, but they are also of excellent might, for they war in the foremost ranks of the Lykians.' Ah, friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither would I fight myself in the foremost ranks, nor would I send thee into the war that giveth men renown, but now—for assuredly ten thousand fates of death do every way beset us, and these no mortal may escape nor avoid—now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to other men, or others to us."

Thus there is a strain of loose Epicureanism in the philosophy of immortality that a superficial glimpse at the

Homeric deities seems to illustrate. They live, love, eat, drink, and quarrel in a perpetual refrain of irrelevant immortality.

"He spake, and the white-armed goddess Hera smiled, and smiling took the cup at her son's hand. Then he poured wine to all the other gods from right to left, ladling the sweet nectar from the bowl. And laughter unquenchable arose amid the blessed gods to see Hephaistos bustling through the palace."

They have all the human virtues and vices, but in an alarming degree. At times they are frankly unmoral, if not immoral. Hera seducing her husband, at the moment when his attention is required for the war, that she may lend her aid to the opposite party; Apollo suddenly taking the form of a Trojan warrior that he may draw off Achilles from the attack on Troy; Athena, the most just of all except Zeus, putting a disgraceful cheat on Hector in his last fight; Zeus himself, the father, sending a lying dream to Agamemnon—all this looks strangely like playing with loaded dice with helpless children. Can humanity have respect for divinity that is a liar and a cheat; where shall man look for models of virtue except to the immortals? Are we not compelled with Plato, in the *Republic*, or Socrates, to accept this levity towards the gods as a sign that Homer was a liar when he left poetry for theology?

And they have less respect for each other than for man. The quarrels—the everlasting quarrels between divinities, bitter and bloodless, but not wordless. Hera against Aphrodite, Athena against Ares, Poseidon the dour god of the sea against all. Heaven seems like nothing less than the home in a shoe with so many quarreling deities that even Zeus was distracted. With a shrew for a wife, whose tongue he can silence only by stern threats of immediate corporal

punishment, Zeus the husband and father is a curious example to hold up before the imagination of man the husband and father. Aphrodite the fair-armed, and Ares, the horrid, dropping down to the plain of Troy to take active part in the battle, and wounded by the arms of a mortal, flying the field, panic-stricken, he bellowing like ten thousand bulls, she like a spoilt child stung by a bee crying to her father for protection and comfort—these things should bring a smile of contempt, not a gasp of admiration and a bending of the knee in adoration.

Did Homer believe in the gods? Whatever his attitude, at least the Trojans and the Achaeans of the story never falter in their belief; yet to them, as to Homer, the deceitful, malicious character of divinity is only too evident. They never cease prayer, and every occasion is seized for a sacrifice and libation. The mystery of divinity—such as it is—is hedged about with taboos and recognitions, a lack of observance of which will, it is argued, bring almost certain destruction; or if the god is propitious, an added present or prayer will be a stitch in time against a later occasion. Yet with a god on their side, they never fail to be disrespectful to a god opposed. Achilles breaks into blasphemy when he discovers the cheat that Apollo has put upon him, but with Athena to aid he does not fear his enmity. Hector abuses Athena almost with his dying breath. They are free in their adorations—these Greeks—having selected the deity to be adored they thumb their noses at the others and even blaspheme them to their faces. This again is a curious religion. But again is it not much as things go in life, and Homer's gods are human with a trifle more of power and intelligence, but by no means perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, or even just. They are to be taken for what they are and accepted with intelligent understanding. The

fool is he who is blind in his attachment or contempt, like Ajax—but that is another story.

In consequence, the gods are always clear in their motives and appearances, clear like the bas-reliefs on the friezes of the Parthenon, and as serene in their activity as a Greek statue. A very different conception of divinity from that of the Hebrew who is crushed into silence by the ineffable weight of the divine attributes. There is for him a gulf between the natural and the supernatural which no imagination may cross, and the ledge of the natural is so perilous that the mind of man trembles before the spectacle of his own futility. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Or "Where wast thou when *I* laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast the power." Before such proclamations of divine majesty the Hebrew imagination lies prostrate. But Homer's is never more than slightly embarrassed when he contemplates the majesty of Zeus and compares it with threadbare humanity.

There is yet something to be said before we can dismiss Homer's Olympians. In their origin the Greek gods were in the main the personification of the powers of nature. And nature, to speak respectfully, is rarely predictable and never quite trustworthy. The exhibitions of its power are as often as not deceitful and even malicious. How else account for the moral perversion of a famine and the obliquity of a pestilence? If man questions all this world of sinister dealing in the unexpected processes of nature, how can he avoid, if he remains intellectually honest, transferring this *insouciance* to his god? Nature is grave or gay, sinister or smiling, careless always and unmoral—a creature of all moods, and the wise man can speak disrespectfully even of the tempest that overwhelms him while he strives with in-

telligent effort to understand its waywardness. Homer was intellectually honest, and he made his gods in the image of nature itself—not trying to penetrate behind to discover a Jehovah of infinite righteousness. Transcendental ideals man can discover in his own heart, but as soon as he looks abroad he sees an irritating criss-cross of motives, quarrelsome and bitter at times, joyous or serene at others; and as the Greek looked at the pattern of the world he lived in, so he conceived the pattern of divinity.

The gods of the *Iliad*, and Zeus in particular, on the other hand, are not always light-minded and trivial. At times there is an austere grandeur in the spectacle of Zeus, the god of justice and power. He is always the object of prayer, and his terrible majesty is a fitting contrast to the triviality of man.

"But of them took the father no heed, but aloof from the others he sat apart, glad in his glory, looking toward the city of the Trojans, and the ships of the Achaians, and the glitter of bronze, and the slayers and the slain."

His nod shakes the world and his will is supreme. He is identified with fate, and again, as he holds up the balance on Hector's last day, fate is a power behind and greater than he. As he draws about him the terrible aegis, the thunder cloud, and grasps his livid bolts, there is nothing to which he may be compared. This is Homer lifting his eyes to Olympus and catching the vision of cosmic justice. It is a Homer that might have become, in another age and clime, a brother of the prophet Isaiah, but it is not often in this spirit that he sang the *Iliad*.

To the gods there is nothing of interest except man. This is the theme of their enthusiasms and their jealousies and hates. Man occupies the stage and the gods are the spec-

tators in the boxes, but often leap to the stage to coach their heroes and discomfit their villains, and always they are calling out their words of encouragement and approval or of derision and contempt. All is as vivid and full of color as a football game with man engaged in a heroic enterprise and the gods betting on the odds and breaking out in cheers, while Zeus is the referee who has more trouble with the spectators than with the players.

Gods and men meet on common ground, in a human world, and every human act, be it never so slight, has also a divine significance. In the main it is a friendly meeting, as are the meetings between man and man; at times there are misunderstandings and resentments; and often man may not be aware of the divine presence. Homer's interest is a human interest in a human world; and if there are divinities—and Homer never doubts their reality as spiritual powers—they are made in man's image and interested only in man's world. There are no divine interests, over and above those of man and nature, to which the attention of the gods is drawn. This again is a thought that has a profound significance for the whole of the tradition of ancient Greece.

In this last we catch Homer's answer to the central problem of evil, the thing that has twisted and tormented the imagination of man since the first day when he stood bewildered by the consciousness of pain and injustice. An easy answer is the one of Job's comforters, that pain is a recompense for ill-doing, and that there is a cosmic book of record where human deeds are set down as assets or liabilities. But no great clear-sightedness is necessary to give this easy optimism the lie. And the Greek, moreover, had no useful devil in his universe to serve as the antagonist of the good. On the contrary, to the Greek imagination, evil like good

comes from the gods. It is the result of some choice man has made and which involves him in a situation from which there is no escape. Troy had sinned deeply, by being guilty of unintelligent blunders in judgment—in either case even a trifle of common sense might have served, but passion and greed blinded the eyes of Laomedon and Paris—and the result was such as might have been foreseen. In such cases evil is due to man's own ignorance or passion, and may be avoided if he only has the power to know. But even this power has in it nothing mystical, for there are Homeric heroes, like Ulysses, who bear a charmed life, and the magic lies wholly in their cautious intelligence. It is for this very reason that he was the favorite of the most intelligent of the gods—Athena—and the despair of his divine enemies. In this sense, then, knowledge is morality and the only possible safeguard against evil.

But often evil comes upon man as a direct result of his own supplications. Achilles prayed the gods for revenge for the insult that Agamemnon had put upon him; and retired in high anger from the fight. The gods answered his prayer—one like this is easily granted and needs no supernatural providence—his revenge and vindication was complete down to the very least detail; and in heaping measure he got more, tragedy. He asked for revenge and he tasted the bitter loss of his best friend. His evil was of his own making. If the gods granted his prayer, all his actions made the gift inevitable. There is, again, no mysticism here.

It is in this intelligible manner that Homer deals with the ever-perplexing idea of human fate. There have been those who have tried to read into the poet's ideas of Fate the utter determinism of a mechanical *Kismet*. And if we take the words of many of his heroes, the course of human

life, or destiny, is a thing no man may escape and its workings beyond the scope of the human mind. "Yea, verily, these issues lie in the laps of the gods. I too will cast my spear, and the rest shall the gods decide." And there is a philosophy of life that has been built around this central idea of the irrelevance of moral freedom and responsibility. The young hero who cast his spear and trusted in the god's decision shows the nobler aspect of this attitude toward life; its less attractive form is seen in the nonchalance of Paris under the reproaches of Helen when he comes in disgrace from the battle to her bower.

"And Paris made answer to her and said: 'Chide not my soul, lady, with cruel taunts. For now indeed hath Menelaos vanquished me with Athene's aid, but another day may I do so unto him; for we too have gods with us. But come now, let us have joy of love. . . .'"

But these speeches are appropriately put into the mouths of his characters by Homer; and to the hero on the plain of Troy as to the overwhelmed soldier in the last war, there would fittingly come a blind sort of trust in destiny; that the spear or the bullet that had his name would in the end find him; to all others he was immune. Yet neither of these attitudes is that of Homer; he is not a participant in his battles, but the interested spectator and sympathetic critic. He was drawn to the story precisely because he thought he could read into what was ordinarily regarded as an edifying example of the ways of Fate and the gods a more human and intelligent pattern. As he pictures the bewilderment, the glory, or the despair of his heroes, he records them, but in their story he sees something far more significant, motives that all humanity may respond to with a thrill of exaltation. And this last addition is the sense, profound always and never absent, of human moral responsibility. This is Fate.



Fate is thus a power higher even than the gods. Zeus in Book XXII would spare Hector, if he could, in that last cruel battle. But he confesses his own helplessness.

"Ay me, a man beloved I see pursued around the wall. My heart is woe for Hector, who hath burnt for me many thighs of oxen amid the crests of many-folded Ida, and other times on the city-height; but now is goodly Achilles pursuing him with swift feet round Priam's town."

It was not that Hector had sinned—quite the opposite. His bank account with the gods, as Zeus himself declares, is all on the right side of the ledger. But notwithstanding the moral and intrepid excellence of Hector, he was a doomed man, for he was the leader of the host of a doomed city; and Troy had made its own doom. He must accept the fate of his city, as must also countless others whose private lives were also blameless, as is always done, if one will but think, by thousands of patriots in any war.

Achilles likewise knows the doom shortly to come to him. When he had embarked for the war he had been faced with the alternative of a brief but glorious career as a warrior, or a long life of peace and prosperity: again a dilemma that many a hero after him has faced. He chose with his eye on the larger compensation. During the war he had raised fierce resentments among both friends and foes, for a hero of the first magnitude is always the most prized victim. He had chosen, and though he laments his fate, he knows that it is inescapable.

"Straightway may I die, since I might not succour my comrade at his slaying. He hath fallen afar from his country and lacked my help in his sore need."

Fate may be hastened by ignorance or passion. When Hector was pressing home the attack on the Greek ships

and the prize seemed so near his grasp, a friend, seeing an omen in the sky, warned him and advised moderation. The enemy had its back against the wall and was fighting now desperately for its very life. At this juncture almost any offer of peace would eagerly have been accepted. But his Trojan impetuosity, his very military gallantry, could see no reason to falter now that the hated enemy was prostrate and he renewed his order for an advance.

"One omen is best, to fight for our own country. And wherefore dost thou fear war and battle?"

But the advance brought the counter-thrust. And when Hector throws his life away in the last act, he does it as a sacrifice to his betrayed countrymen, that he may atone for his lack of wisdom.

Over and over Homer drives home these truths: that intelligent action may avoid fate and that ignorance and passion may raise situations that make it inevitable. For destiny is man-made, and the gods distribute to man only what man has called for. But this also is the theme of all great tragedy.

If the gods in the *Iliad* are reduced to the stature of man, man on the other hand is raised almost to the level of gods. This in spite of the numerous reminders of the futility of his life.

"For methinketh there is nothing more piteous than a man among all things that breathe and creep upon the earth."

But the hero never quite gives way to this attitude of self-pity and never resigns the life of action. The "great renunciation" we shall see in another people's philosophy of life, Homer can find no room for in the heart of any of his characters. Nor, on the other hand, are they impeccable mon-

sters of perfection. The stark Beowulf, the gallant Siegfried, without fear and without reproach, of our northern mythology, or the single-minded Roland of the *Chanson de Roland*, or the flawless Rama of the Indian *Ramayana*, these are personages that the Greek imagination would have rejected as being beyond the pale of the human. As resolutely does he refuse to degrade his heroes, as does a modern realist, who forgets in an obsession with the trivial to recognize the large lines of their nobility. The men, and the women, in Homer are a purged humanity, freed from the circumstances of irrelevant alloy, and yet by no means secure from the weaknesses and imperfections of humanity itself. "*Homo sum, humani alienum nihil a me puto.*" This confession of human weakness may equally be made by Homer's least and greatest. The poet offers incense to ideal humanity, but he insists that the ideal be human and intelligible.

So the Greek heroes are often mean, weak, or unworthy. How skillfully Homer moulds the personality of Paris—Paris the spoiled darling, the lover of the beautiful, the sport of his own impulses, the coward in heart and the gentleman in speech and bearing, selfish, treacherous, loving, generous. There have been characters in history who have had these traits—Alcibiades was one—the exquisite and popular idol, with just one flaw—but that fatal and the cause of woes unnumbered to his city. You like such people in spite of yourself. Even the best of the Homeric heroes are not above a bribe, if it be appropriately offered, and none but are on the lookout for easy treasure. In this at times they are not unlike a bravely apparelled footman, eager to unbend for a tip. They are open to all emotions, and they never fear to express them generously. Achilles, the noblest, when outraged sulks by the sea beach,

watering the waves with his tears as he blubbers his wrath to his mother. They never hesitate to show fear. Hector the peerless when he sees Achilles approach, though the whole city is watching, cowers in fear, then on an impulse runs from his enemy like a startled child. Patroclus weeps in grief before Achilles when his heart is touched by the fate of his companions.

"And noble swift-footed Achilles when he beheld him was grieved for his sake, and accosted him, and spake winged words, saying: 'Wherefore weepest thou, Patroklos, like a fond little maid, that runs by her mother's side, and bids her mother take her up, snatching at her gown, and hinders her in her going, and tearfully looks at her, till the mother takes her up? like her, Patroklos, dost thou let fall soft tears.' "

Such heroes are impatient and unrestrained in anger. Achilles' better judgment keeps his wrath on the lee side of discretion, but his language to Agamemnon has all the rich flavor of Achaean billingsgate. And Agamemnon, the general in command, the king of kings, loses his dignity for a moment and falls to with equal fervor:

"Go home with thy ships and company and lord it among thy Myrmidons; I reckon not aught of thee nor care I for thine indignation; and this shall be my threat to thee . . . Mine own self will I go to thy hut and take Briseis of the fair cheeks, even thy meed of honour, that thou mayest well know how far greater I am than thou, and so shall another hereafter abhor to match his words with mine and rival me to my face."

Contrast this with the restrained wrath of heroes in the chivalric romances. But Homer's are the more human, for the emotions they exhibit are real. They are not posturing, but talking from the heart. There are also hopelessly unattractive characters, like Thersites.

". . . Only Thersites still chattered on, the uncontrolled of speech, whose mind was full of words many and disorderly, wherewith to strive

against the chiefs idly and in no good order, but even as he deemed that he should make the Argives laugh. And he was ill-favoured beyond all men that came to Ilios. Bandy-legged was he, and lame of one foot, and his two shoulders rounded, arched down upon his chest; and over them his head was warped, and a scanty stubble sprouted on it. hateful was he to Achilles above all and to Odysseus, for them he was wont to revile."

But Thersites is not a caricature of an Achaean radical. His portrait is not for the comic supplement or the anti-communist press. He, too, is human, and we can spare him more than a drop of sympathy, for he had a cause.

They are garrulous. Nestor, the grandfather of the host, the old man of old men, a character that can never become outworn, on the slightest occasion has his word in season:

"For my strength is no longer what it was before in my supple limbs. Would that I were in such youth, and my might as steadfast, as when . . ."

And he will run on on this theme for a hundred precious lines, even though a battle is raging about him. His rival, Phoenix, is more charming, the tutor and friend of Achilles, and on the night when an embassy waited on his master to beg that he refrain from his wrath, the old man read a long homily—Polonius-like. But he is more lovable than Shakespeare's old man, for in his night-long monologue there occurs this precious jewel:

"Nay, even the very gods can bend, and theirs withal is loftier majesty and honour and might. Their hearts by incense and reverent vows and drink-offering and burnt-offering men turn with prayer, so oft as any transgresseth and doeth sin. Moreover Prayers of penitence are daughters of great Zeus, halting and wrinkled and of eyes askance, that have their task withal to go in the steps of Sin. For Sin is strong and fleet of foot, wherefore she far outrunneth all prayers, and goeth before them over all the earth making men fall, and Prayers follow behind to heal the harm."

And had Achilles only caught the full significance of the aged wisdom, Homer's poem would have had to search for another theme.

With what skill this Greek handles the theme of woman! Hecuba, Andromache, Helen,—the mother of a score of sons, the young wife of Hector and mother of his boy, and the misplaced cause of the war. The anguish of the mother who before her eyes sees the death of her favorite son; the anticipated anguish in the heart of Andromache as she takes her last farewell of husband and lover; the genuine sorrow of Helen over the knightly corpse of the only man she had ever looked up to; these are things only genius can compass; here it is discovered in a world before history began. Nor will Homer give Helen, though she was the immediate cause of the war, too prominent a place in the poem. Yet the power of her presence he also will never allow the reader to forget.

"Small blame is it that Trojans and well-greaved Achaians should for such a woman long time suffer hardships; marvellously like is she to the immortal goddesses to look upon."

But if the gods are often trivial and the heroes marred by human frailties, how preserve in all this flawed universe the theme of the grandeur of man? Homer's heroes, though flawed, are redeemed by intelligent action. They labor under no illusions about their present lot or the future. Life always exacts a heavy toll of suffering, for they are surrounded by an unpitying universe. So Achilles sees it in the last great scene:

"This is the lot the gods have spun for miserable men, that they should live in pain; yet themselves are sorrowless. For two urns stand upon the floor of Zeus filled with his evil gifts, and one with blessings. To whomsoever Zeus whose joy is in the lightning dealeth a mingled lot, that man

chanceth now upon ill and now again on good, but to whom he giveth but of the bad kind him he bringeth to scorn, and evil famine chaseth him over the goodly earth, and he is a wanderer honoured of neither gods nor men."

Nor do they delude themselves about a future where happy immortality will pay "glad life's arrears". Death, rather, is the last misfortune and the greatest:

"Even as so he spake the end of death overshadowed him. And his soul, fleeing from his limbs, went down to the house of Hades, wailing its own doom, leaving manhood and youth."

And the life after death is a pale, shadowy existence, cheerless and dark, best seen in the *Odyssey*.

" . . . And lo, the spirits of the dead that be departed gathered them from out of Erebus. Brides and youths unwed, and old men of many and evil days, and tender maidens with grief yet fresh at heart; and many there were, wounded with bronze-shod spears, men slain in fight with their bloody mail about them. And these many ghosts flocked together from every side about the trench with a wondrous cry, and pale fear gat hold on me."

But these thoughts do not dismay the hero or leave him contemplating musically the spectacle of his futility, as it does the English translator of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar.

"Ah, my Belovèd, fill the Cup that clears  
To-day of past Regrets and Future Fears:  
To-morrow!—Why, To-morrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years."

Life, rather, is the great adventure, the only opportunity offered man, a game which ultimately he must lose. But into it let him crowd what he can of the zest of personal action at its heroic best. Only thus will he justify himself to others and to himself.

"Then Odysseus, spearman renowned, was left alone, nor did one of the Argives abide by him, for fear had fallen on them all. Then in heaviness he spoke to his own great-hearted spirit: 'Ah, me, what thing shall befall me! A great evil it is if I flee, in dread of the throng; yet worse is this, if I be taken all alone, for the other Danaans hath Kronion scattered in flight. But wherefore doth my heart thus converse with herself? for I know that they are cowards, who flee the fight, but whosoever is a hero in war, him it mainly behoves to stand stubbornly, whether he be smitten, or whether he smite another.'"

Only when life has thus been lived to the richest and last thrilling episode, can one achieve the only possible compensation for the adventure, self-respect.

This is the glory, this is the goal, that Achilles selected with the attached penalty of a short life and a painful, instead of the painless ease of a long and uneventful reign and prosperous peace. Only thus could he justify his long wrath against Agamemnon that burned because he had been degraded before the assembled host. It is for this that he breaks forth in tears to his mother Thetis:

"Mother, seeing thou didst of a truth bear me to so brief span of life, honour at the least ought the Olympian to have granted me, even Zeus that thundereth on high; but now doth he not honour me, no, not one whit."

It is the same glory that inspires the noble deeds of the princely Hector, at the moment when he is taking his last farewell of his dear wife Andromache and his boy Astyanax. He knows perfectly that he is going to his death, that his wife will some day live the lonely life of a captive in some Greek city. But he is the prince, the leader of his people, looked up to by all as the mirror of knightly self-sacrifice. How can the others be driven to take their places in the battle if he, their prince and general, does not set the ex-



ample and fight in the forefront of his countrymen, ever ready to meet the deadliest of dangers?

"Surely I take thought for all these things, my wife; but I have very sore shame of the Trojans and Trojan dames with trailing robes, if like a coward I shrink away from battle. Moreover mine own soul forbiddeth me, seeing I have learnt ever to be valiant and fight in the forefront of the Trojans, winning my father's great glory and mine own. Yea of a surety I know this in heart and soul; the day shall come for holy Ilios to be laid low, and Priam and the folk of Priam of the good ashen spear. Yet doth the anguish of the Trojans hereafter not so much trouble me, neither Hekabe's own, neither king Priam's, neither my brethren's, the many and brave that shall fall in the dust before their foemen, as doth thine anguish in the day when some mailclad Achaian shall lead thee weeping and rob thee of the light of freedom. . . . But me in death may the heaped-up earth be covering, ere I hear thy crying and thy carrying into captivity."

It is not a selfish desire for glory that their names may go down through the ages and thus serve as a post-mortem compensation for the pain of death—there is no compensation for death—but rather a noble acceptance of life as a gift to be exploited to its end, so that on its surrender the hero may have lived without "sin in his heart." These are the words of Phoenix, the aged tutor of Achilles, a man who had seen much and acquired wisdom.

There is a stern optimism here that is all compelling. It is not, as it has been represented, the boyish enthusiasm of a young race and youthful heroes, who throw themselves into the adventure of living, not counting the cost. It is not the careless optimism of those who rush into danger and trust to a good fairy to pluck them from the sin of their rashness. Homer punishes impetuous bravery, like that of the cavalier of all romantic fiction, as justly as it meets its deserts in real life. His great heroes meet life with no illusions about its pitiless carelessness with all romantic ideals.

Like the romantic hero Paris goes to his duel, with all the nonchalance of the leader of a grand march. But he comes out saved only by the nimbleness of his legs and with the loss of self-respect. Hector, a true hero, meets his duel with Achilles in a far different spirit. He too shows fear, but he saves his self-respect.

This is the philosophy of the active life, a philosophy of a people who must make good, not alone in a mere struggle for existence,—since the battle for life is never so stern as Homer pictures it, as thus to call out all one's latent powers—, but a philosophy for such heroes as see some great gain in the mere effort of a concentrated personality. It sets itself no easy goal, but pushes out in imagination beyond the horizon into the uncharted and unexplored regions of human endeavor. It is the thing that prompts the mental energy of the explorer and scientist, of the scholar and the artist, of the statesman and the philosopher, as well as of the man of arms. It is this self-reliant, self-respecting, whole-hearted human personality, thus early displaying itself in the lines of Homer's epic, which gave the clue to Greece and made Greece for all time the intellectual, moral, and artistic inspiration of all Europe; and later granted to the smallest continent the moral leadership of the world.

There is also one more word to be said. The vision that Homer caught of the world and the gods that ruled it and the men that moved in it, is that of an orderly world. The processes of the gods and men and even of nature, through the gods, are orderly processes. The ways of the gods are not past finding out, and the human reason is the instrument that may inquire into their orderly workings and record its findings. Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, even Aphrodite and Ares, are not unintelligible spiritual forces acting in a hopelessly eccentric manner. Rather they are as orderly in their

motives as are their human counterparts, the men in whom they are so much interested. This magnificent discovery—if it was a discovery and not a faith—is the first and fundamental postulate for all human science. Without the faith that this universe, human and divine, is intelligible and orderly, there could be no human curiosity about its manifestations, and thus no science. Homer laid the foundation stones for science, in a day when there was no such word in any vocabulary; but the faith that he expressed became for Europe its most precious heritage.

In the *Iliad*, then, we catch one thread, and a very significant one, that is to enter into the texture of our life and thought even to-day, three thousand years after Homer went to his forgotten grave. It is a belief in intelligent human activity, a faith in human nature, in spite of the pain of tragedy and disillusionment. There is in it a trust in the value of well-spent energy, a patience under distress, a piety, though the gods themselves are not impeccable, and a very genuine sympathy with human weakness. Above all it is a practical philosophy of life, not given to mystical speculation, clear as the outlines of the landscape of Hellas, a philosophy that will encourage individualism, grounded on a fervent faith that life is worth the living, and that its greatest joy is the accomplishment of self-respect.

But more than this, though a poem of war, in the last books the poet never fails to record war's horrors and disillusionments. Achilles chewing the bitter cud of self-reproach and remorse; Priam on his knees before the murderer of his sons; the grief-stricken mother, Hecuba, the despairing wife, Andromache, and the bewildered Helen, cause of it all. These are not scenes of exultation for the pomp and pride and circumstance of immortal war. They are rather the passionate recantation of one who had known

war and its horrors and now presents his plea against its unintelligent barbarity. It must have required no small courage in the court minstrel, singing the warfare of Troy before his audience of warriors, to set forth thus boldly the thing by which they lived as an evil because it was unintelligent and unhuman.

### III. THE ODYSSEY

"These things the gods wrought. They spun the thread of life thin for some, that others in time to come might have a song." *Odyssey*.

With the *Odyssey* we enter with Homer a new world, a wistful region of romantic comedy now instead of the sterner reality of war and tragedy, and it is almost as though it were a new poet opening an unexpected series of new adventures. The Greek critic Longinus speaks of this poem as the song of Homer's old age, a calmer and more serene region, after his tempestuous youth has given place to the gentler passions of mellowed experience, a poem of old age, but the old age of Homer. Longinus' is a clever guess and ought to be true. Not often in the history of the world's literature has it been given to a poet to compose two great epic poems, and two that differ so markedly. But the signs that it is Homer's genius that casts the spell are too numerous. The Homer of the *Iliad* is still the Homer of the *Odyssey*, but he like Shakespeare can alter his manner from tragedy to comedy and be supreme in both.

For the ideal in this poem, at first sight, is quite the opposite to that of the *Iliad*. In Hector and Achilles we have the glory of self-realization through action. To be sure, to both action brings grievous tragedy, and to the Achaean warrior disillusionment and horror, yet the poem casts its spear, its heroes quit themselves like men, confident in their

own worth, and the rest they leave to the gods. But here the hero longs for home and rest from his labors. The adventures he undertakes are all forced upon him by a ruthless destiny. He wanders over the cosmic universe driven by the sting of desire. He attains his desire, but it is not quite the orthodox conclusion with all spectres laid—but this is to anticipate. If the poem is comedy, it has none of the joy of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The world Ulysses faced is not the carefree Forest of Arden and the terrors he encountered were not things of straw and pasteboard.

The connection between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is a close one, but the character of Ulysses has changed in the last grim days of the war. At last the city has fallen and the dirty business of slaughter and burning is over. The heroes set out for home. Ulysses with his men has the longest voyage, across the Aegean, around the peninsula of Greece and up the west shore to his island, Ithaca—to-day a pleasant sail of two days amid the most exquisite of island and mainland scenery. But the sea had its terrors in those early days when ships were not more than open boats at the mercy of sudden squalls. And Ulysses and his men had their fill of adventure in the known world and the unknown, until at last shipwrecked and alone he is cast on the island of Ogygia in the middle of the ocean and saved by Calypso, a lonely goddess far from the haunts of gods and men, and who now falls in love with this handsome stranger. For long years she keeps him, anxious to win his love and to make him her immortal husband. But Ulysses "in the daytime would sit on the rocks and on the beach, straining his soul with tears, and groans, and griefs, and through his tears he would look wistfully over the unharvested deep."

In the meanwhile things were not all going well in the

palace at Ithaca. His wife Penelope, left with a baby at her breast when the war broke out, now twenty years after is worried at his continued absence. The war is over, has been for ten years, and she is beset by all the eligible young men of the neighborhood who see in her a rich and attractive bride. Her son, young Telemachus, barely twenty, is not powerful enough to make his claims good, and to avoid death must be sent from home for advice and friends. At precisely this juncture Ulysses is finally permitted to leave his charming hostess, and after one more battle with the sea and one more shipwreck, is taken by Nausicaa, the young daughter of rich King Alcinous, to her father's palace in the realm of Phaeacia. Ulysses has a way with women, young and old; he wins the approval of Queen Areté, the mother, and at a banquet he finally discloses himself. The scene is dramatic.

"I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, who am in men's minds for all manner of wiles, and my fame reaches unto heaven."

Then he tells the story of his wanderings. It is a long story, from the land of the Lotus Eaters to the cave of the Cyclops, the island of Circe and that of the sinister but fascinating Sirens. He sees the power of Charybdis and of that "hopeless horror", Scylla. One by one his boats and his men are lost. He must journey even to the place of Hades, the god of departed spirits, and hold converse with the shades of the dead. Tales of travel, real or imaginary, —there have been many since the earliest day when a traveler could anticipate the thrill of his returning narrative. And judged by all external standards, these accounts of regions beyond the ocean and of monsters such as the human eye never saw, show Homer's skill with what Aristotle generously called the impossible.

Such a judgment, however, could be only superficial. Homer is not interested chiefly in the manner in which the impossible is embroidered with the plausible. He is not trying to be a convincing liar. There is, in the first place, a deal of very real geographical fact in this farrago of invention, and even the dark Cimmerian Land may be discovered on a map if one looks in the right place. But Homer is chiefly interested in the character of Ulysses, as he escapes from one crisis to the next, as he sees his followers slain, and his hopes dashed when they seem on the point of achievement. It is the Ulysses of patient endeavor, the hero with unflagging courage, of limitless resource, and yet the man who could also feel the clutch of terror and touch the brink of despair, and not falter. The man who was never boastful, who only once overlooked discretion, who inspired his men to the last, who never shirked danger, but never sought it, who to the end kept his faith in his god, and yet never presumed on the divine power and relaxed his vigilance. This is the Ulysses Homer is interested in, and it is to show this that he sets forth the wanderings.

Charmed, the court of King Alcinous hears the story to the last, the king nods his approval to his request, and the next night Ulysses is set ashore, alone, on his island kingdom. It takes Homer the last twelve books of the twenty-four to tell of this home-coming. Twenty years—and now home. Shall he go at once and proclaim his arrival and embrace his wife and son? What has taken place during his absence? What friends can he count on? Who are his enemies? Much can happen in even less time, and he has had no news. One must be discreet even in a homecoming, especially after twenty years.

It is now another Ulysses, made over for the purpose

of spying out the land and discovering his resources. The suitors are many and clamorous. They have forced Penelope to give her word that she will choose and at once. And out of a kingdom's citizens, Ulysses can count on only three helpers—his son and two slaves. As a beggar he haunts the palace, looking curiously into the conduct of his wife and her servants, insulted grievously by princes and slaves. He is recognized by his old nurse as she washes his legs, but he must choke back her glad cry with "Mother, will you kill me?" He is recognized by his old hunting dog, who dies for joy as he creeps toward his master's hand. These and no others know their returned hero and king. Until at last, with the help of the three, in a blaze of wrath that now can freely burn, he slays the miscreants that have tortured his wife, squandered his wealth, and made his household a reproach. Then in a glad acknowledgment he is joined to his wife.

But the story does not end here. As in the *Iliad*, we must see the final consequences of the main act of the drama, and it is in these postludes that Homer often reveals his richest comment. Ulysses has been an adventurer and a man of blood, and his last act, in spite of the justice of his wrath, has been the most outrageous of all, for he has spilled the choicest lives of all Ithaca and the neighboring states. Restored to his sceptre and wife, he must yet face the resentment of his own people. Like a too-discreet commander, also, he has returned alone, leaving the memories of his companions to cry out against him from many a lonely hearth; and this double motive for bitterness will not down, be his heroic qualities never so dazzling. Bloodshed is averted by calmer counsels—in the story it is Zeus and Athena that intervene—but no one is happy. Ten years of effort and longing, a dramatic return that makes his own



home a shambles, and inveterate hate. This is the home to which the hero returns. I wonder: Did Ulysses in his heart ever think wistfully of the unbroken peace of the island of Calypso, for only among the immortals are deeds without bitter fruitage, and desires fulfilled that do not display scorpion-like a sting in the tail?

As the human scope of this poem has been narrowed from the larger political complexity of the *Iliad* to the narrower pattern of the single heroic soul, so likewise the interest of divinity has likewise been narrowed to relatively few gods. In the war against Troy all the gods had a personal interest. Here, on the other hand, we have the welfare of only one individual, and in consequence, three gods are enough, but the three most powerful—Poseidon, the god of the sea, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Zeus, the father. And it is by no accident that these deities reveal themselves in a manner that is far more spiritual, and yet always utterly human and intelligible. And their motives blend perfectly with those of the hero as he strives, now against almost insuperable obstacles, now seemingly with everything in his favor, to accomplish his quest. They become, curiously, the symbols of the matchless resolve and brilliant skill of the daring adventurer, and of the relentless powers of nature in storm and pitiless savagery that he must evade or overcome. Never a direct aid that is not also within the powers of man to furnish, never an obstacle that nature herself does not put in his path, and at the appropriate moment a whispered word of advice, or a chance omen, that might as easily come from the heart of man himself. Here again the Homeric gods blend into the panorama of human action, and lend to it only a richer human significance. In this poem, even more than in the *Iliad*, Homer makes the supernatural intelligible.

More than this, it is in large part the story of a fantastic journey into the realm of the imagination. The opening words of the invocation to the poem set the theme: "Many were the men whose towns he saw and whose minds he learnt, yea, and many were the woes he suffered in his heart upon the deep." It is not the extraordinary or the supernatural character of the adventure that was to impress the mind of the hero or of the poet's listeners, but the knowledge that they give of man and his ways in the unexplored parts of the world. A brief comparison of the adventures of Ulysses with those of Sinbad the Sailor ought to make this obvious. Ulysses, even when hard put to it to save his life, is curiously alive to the significance of the adventure and the human quality of the object with which he has to deal. When he is imprisoned in the cave of the Cyclops, he records an anthropological fact about a new anthropoidal genus; when he passes the island of the Sirens he will hear their song that no mortal has heard and lived; when he passes the hideous Scylla he keeps his place, armed, on the poop of his ship; and from each he adds to his store of knowledge. Nor must we, in this age of scientific knowledge of a world that has shrunk past reckoning, scorn the unverifiable curiosities of Ulysses' story. The startling thing is that though exaggerated beyond human stature, each and all of these monsters are essentially human. The relentless savagery of the Laestrygonians, who speared men as men spear fish, the misanthropy of the Cyclops, the allure of the Sirens, these are only exaggerations, not dehumanizations, of extraordinary but real experience.

But the greatest experience of all—and the most terrifying—is that in the land of the shades. There Homer records for us his ideas of the life after death and his interpretation of spirit. Great poetry has ever sought this,

the most alluring and most tantalizing of themes. Virgil, Dante, Milton—to name only the great—have sought out this realm to explore its secrets. And what has this poet, earliest of all, found to record? Does he bring to his knightly hearers a story of a region where valor on the battlefield shall be rewarded, as did Mohammed to the embattled Crescent? Does he find a compensation for the ills of this life and the pangs of misprised merit? Hear Achilles, the noblest of them all:

“Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, oh great Odysseus. Rather would I live on ground as the hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed.”

Hear the ironical advice of Agamemnon who was brutally slain by his wife, Clytemnestra:

“So surely is there nought more terrible and shameless than a woman who imagines such evil in her heart, even as she too planned a foul deed, fashioning death for her wedded lord. Wherefore so thou too, never henceforth be soft even to thy wife, neither show her all the counsel that thou knowest, but a part declare and let part be hid.”

And this to Ulysses who is staking everything on his return to home and wife. Taste this grief of the great-hearted son as he caught a pathetic glimpse of his own mother, a shrinking shade, homeless in this vast region of eternal darkness. Has ever poet in any tongue caught a mother's despair and a son's grief in a more poignant scene of utter woe?

“‘It was not the archer goddess of the keen sight, who slew me in my halls with the visitation of her gentle shafts, nor did any sickness come upon me, such as chiefly with a sad wasting draws the spirit from the limbs; nay, it was my sore longing for thee, and for thy counsels, great Odysseus, and for thy loving-kindness that reft me of sweet life.’”

"So spake she, and I mused in my heart and would fain have embraced the spirit of my mother dead. Thrice I sprang towards her, and was minded to embrace her; thrice she flitted from my hands as a shadow or even as a dream, and sharp grief arose ever at my heart."

Such is the compensation for living, for quiet piety, as for heroic magnanimity. His pictures of the life hereafter are as resolutely drawn in keeping with attainable human nature and a refusal to allow a prejudice or hope to sway his imagination, as are his judgments on the value of life and the disillusionment of desire. Here is a poet who at all costs will never forsake human fact, as he conceives it.

And it is this knowledge that slowly unfolds for us the personality of Ulysses—one of the most complex and persistent characters in the world. Set him beside his brother Achilles. The one is ennobled by action, mistaken at times, impetuous always, tragic in the consequences of his one great error, and as tragically disillusioned at the close. The other, the hero of the *Odyssey*, is ennobled by patience and suffering, and yet not prostrate when action is demanded. Calm in danger, though he does not hesitate to show fear, but when the moment for action comes resolute and resourceful; as he is in the cave of the Cyclops, so is he in his great last anger. Patient until the time to strike, counting his resources and submitting to indignity when the hour had not yet struck; see him the night before the last great fight, alone amid myriad dangers, comforting himself thus:

"Endure, my heart; yea, a baser thing thou once didst bear, on that day when the Cyclops, unrestrained in fury, devoured the mighty men of my company. . . ."

He is open to all emotion, like the youth he is, in spite of his years. A gentleman always, equally courteous to the girl

Nausicaa, to Calypso, to Areté, to King Alcinous, to the swineherd Eumaeus, he moves in all companies, of men and women, with perfect poise and becoming modesty. Cunning he was beyond words, and a liar when occasion demanded, for he loved a good lie—it served his purpose and showed his impeccable intelligence; and it always requires more skill to tell a lie than the truth. But cunning was necessary, a protective device, like that of the fox, necessary if he would save his life. Restlessly curious also, finding only one zest in his adventures as they added to his store of human knowledge, and willing at the end to embark on one last adventure that his tale may be full. Not seeking action, but when it was forced upon him thrilled with energy. For through it all he is borne by an ideal as inflexible as his own character. Against this the disillusionment of Hades, the emptiness of hope, the charms of goddess or of woman, may never prevail. "He desires because he loves, and he succeeds because he desires." And yet like Achilles his success at the end brings the final knowledge of the eternal discrepancy between desire and fulfillment. This is Ulysses.

As such Ulysses is a symbol, like Achilles. The *Odyssey* like the *Iliad* is the poem of the active life, but this time the search is not for military glory but for peace. If the *Iliad* is the poem of restless ambition, the *Odyssey* is the cry of the far-flung adventurer for home and rest. But this search in itself is the greatest of all adventures, for it is not the glory of self-realization in conflict, but the richer glory of experience and knowledge, and above all, knowledge of one's self. Life is still a glorious adventure; be the years few or many they are still far too short to waste a moment in idleness or depression. The home is distant and hence more dear, and the road to peace lies through regions uncouth and

dangerous. These few years and this adventure are all that man has to compensate for the pitiful shadow of existence that awaits beyond the grave. The hollow men of Hades tell of their griefs and resentments and their longings for the sun, but to Ulysses it is but one more nugget of knowledge to add to the sum of life's attainment and thus to justify his having lived. Thus despair is a spur to make what yet remains count worthily before peace has been attained, and he pushes on into the unknown in his restless search.

Is there not in this allegory of Ulysses—lying under the fascinating story if we look curiously into the matter—the restless spirit of the Greeks that made them the scientists, philosophers, and artists for all time? If it was the indomitable spirit of the *Iliad* that carried Greece through the crises of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis to the self-respect of the democracy of Athens and to empire under Alexander; is there not in the *Odyssey* the same spirit of indomitable adventure in other unknown realms, and the triumphant return of such conquerors as Phidias, Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle? From the one came the world-conquering hoplitē; from the other the equally victorious science, philosophy, and the Parthenon.

The Greek looked upon the world in which he lived and found it good and an object for his intelligent curiosity, and he loved it accordingly. And in this world there is no object so worthy or so lovable as life, and in its wise adventure he found the eternal secret for the joy of living. It lies in action, intellectual, physical, moral, wisely directed and wisely restrained. Even the least of the heroes of Homer feels and knows this supreme joy of personality richly engaged against odds. The greatest know more, that the supremest action can bring no perfect satisfaction; for it is of the essence of human personality to pierce beyond hori-

zons. No search of glory or of science can ever attain the supreme reward. Alexander wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer. Aristotle wrote four hundred volumes of the world's science with the same unattained satisfaction.



### III. THE MYSTERY OF TEARS

#### I. THE THEME

"The living power of mind prevailed,  
And forth he launched beyond the flaming ramparts of the sky,  
In thought and in imagination." LUCRETIVS.

LITERATURE, and especially poetry, among the Greeks was a spoken thing. It is often difficult now, when we read so much more easily than we hear, to catch the full significance of the music of the Greek poets. One can reconstruct, in imagination, the scene of a recitation of Homer; he himself has given us the cue. But to see and to hear the symphony of a Greek tragedy, that Parthenon in visible music, the symbolical slow dance and chant of the chorus, the arias of the actors in graceful pose like a frieze against the temple-like scenium, the altar in the foreground crowned by a halo of incense to remind us that this is a sacred festival, the tier upon tier of open seats rising against the hill of the Acropolis crowned with pillared temples, like another frieze against the sky, in the distance, the blue of the sea sown with emeralds—the music, the voices, the near presence of all nature and man—the spectacle was such that not the smallest soul in Athens failed to thrill to the depths. In place of this we have only the



poet's lines, and if fortunate, an imagination to reconstruct past glories.<sup>1</sup>

Why did the Athenian audience year after year assemble on the appointed days to witness the tragedies of national heroes and heroines done in verse by some of the world's greatest poets? Why do we after these two millenniums and a half read these tragedies and likewise pronounce them good for our souls?

The answer to the first question will depend in part on an understanding of what had taken place in Greece during the five hundred years that had passed since Homer had become as intimate a part of the life of every citizen of the Greek state as the Hebrew scriptures ever were of the life of the Puritan Englishman. The classical Greek lived surrounded by the aura of poetic myth, which was to him of vastly greater significance than sober history. He turned and returned to the lives of the old heroes, and above all to the serious crises in their lives, their sufferings as well as their victories, in search of the edification our ancestors discovered in the stories of the prophets and kings of Judah and Israel. They were his imaginative inner life.

In the centuries after Homer Greece and Athens in particular had prospered exceedingly. The little city states, of the days of Homer, had become flourishing centers of industry and trade; and Athens was the head of a large

<sup>1</sup> One ought to say a great deal about the Greek stage and stage-craft in this day of reviving interest in these plays. But there are excellent authorities on the subject, and no community within a thousand miles of a university has failed to have learned lectures on the theme by admirably equipped professors of Greek, or admirers of professors. There have to be some limits to these chapters. Professor La Rue Van Hook's excellent little book on *Greek Life and Thought* ought to be in any public library. It has also an excellent bibliography. May I only add that all we know about the Greek stage is by inference; and that, as I said above, it requires an imagination which no lecture can supply, to see the *Agamemnon* or the *Oedipus* as it was on its first day. See also the Introduction to Professor Lane Cooper's edition of *Ten Greek Plays*.

confederacy, virtually the capital of a huge maritime commercial and military empire. The democracy that was already struggling for birth in Homer was now an accomplished fact in Athens; and had proved its political efficiency in the trying days of the Persian wars when it had been compelled to bear the brunt of the Asiatic thrust. In the wake of the victory there had come a burst of intellectual and artistic creation that must have surprised the Greeks themselves; Athens became the model of all that art, literature, and commerce could hope to achieve. The splendor of it yet thrills the imagination, even after the passage of the centuries. While Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were competing in the theatre for the tragic crown; while his brilliant predecessors were teaching the art of comedy to the young Aristophanes; while Socrates was beginning his career of peripatetic wisdom and intelligent club conversation; while Pericles was experimenting on the form of the Athenian constitution and gaily undertaking further wars of conquest; while architects and sculptors were busy with the lines of the Parthenon and Erechtheum; while there was all this bustle and novelty of intellectual life, is it any wonder that the most humble citizen—slave even—could not fail to respond to the thrill and contribute, if nothing more, an enlightened interest to the stirrings of national genius? There will come only one later age that will repeat the wonder and the fresh novelty of Periclean Athens.

Why then at a period when life painted on a canvas with the colors of the rainbow, did tragedy of a depth and poignancy the world was to see only once again lay claim to the crown of literary excellence? How could a people wholly prosperous and happy turn as whole-heartedly to the spectacle of passion and grief? And what in the tragic

horror of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides is germane to the moral life of to-day?

The experience of tragedy is as old as human nature—the consciousness driven deep into the human heart of the pitiful discrepancy between aspiration and attainment. Homer had more than one tragic episode in his *Iliad*—the stories of Hector and Achilles are a double catastrophe as bitter for the victor as the victim. Greek myth was full of the stories of heroes who had achieved heroism only to pay its price in suffering. Early in the history of the land there had slowly developed the festival of grief, consecrated to some favorite local hero, or to some God, who became the symbol of the tears that are the fate of things mortal. "*Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.*" In these early festivals, when the pains of the hero were expressed in a communal song of lamentation, and where acting and gestures, symbolic of the mood, became a sacred liturgy, before a stage and theatre was dreamed of, dramatic tragedy was born. The celebration of the Catholic mass is not too remote reminiscence of precisely this early communal service. The aim of Greek tragedy was not to represent on the stage an action by means of realistic dialogue and action; but by means of poetry, symbolical action, gestures, graceful poses, and music to present a situation of poignant grief. The spectators, too, were on hand with a different preoccupation; they came to be edified instead of entertained. Yet as one reads the lines of the text, striving hopefully to reconstruct the scene, catching the cadences in the Greek lines and the music of the lyrical choruses, one cannot but feel that here the ancient Greek had a spectacle as moving as the most potent tragedies of Shakespeare. The baleful homecoming of Agamemnon, the fatal paradox of Oedipus, the hideous dilemma of sweet

Antigone, the agonized futility of Prometheus, these are passionate griefs that are as humanly true to-day as they were on the sun-lit slopes of the Acropolis twenty-five centuries ago.

Tears and laughter, the double mystery of joy and of suffering, and the darker of these is suffering—these are the motives behind tragedy and comedy. They were discovered when man first became conscious of his human nature, they have not altered, save as their motives have become more complex, in succeeding millenniums. Homer struggled with these and gave us his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But a half-millennium after Homer, in the narrow compass of a single lifetime, three mighty poets came to record in Greek poetry their answers to the insistent problem of human suffering.

That their theme might be more convincing the Greeks selected subjects from sacred history. It is true that for their purposes these stories of old and familiar heroes and demigods offered many advantages. The situations were well known, like those in the Passion Play; and the spectators went to catch the peculiar uplift of conscience before the present suffering of sacred personalities. More than this, there was all the potency of their great names and mythical grandeur, coming out of the shades of a glorious past when gods and men walked the earth together, to lend its power to the poet's art. There is nothing in the deflowered hero of microscopic biography to-day which can call up a fraction of the thrill with which the conqueror Agamemnon was then greeted as he stepped across the stage—to his certain and anticipated death.

It was by thus looking into the lives of the heroes of the past, and reading into their tragic grief the things that even the humblest citizen might discover in his own life, that

the tragic poet succeeds in discovering for us likewise something of value. Oedipus is something more than the mythical King of Thebes, and his situation has something more universally human in it than a fantastic story of murder and incest. Alcestis, the wife who was willing to die that her husband Admetus might live, exhibits, in this story of a day when gods were companions of men, something also of perennial wifely devotion. The eternal human problems have not changed their nature, though their ancient dress may at first look fantastic. They are the general human themes of duty, heroism, pride, love of liberty, passion in revolt, of instinct rising from its hidden depths and twisting or thwarting reason, of justice, revenge, ambition; such are the materials out of which tragedy in any age is made, for there is no experience of man more universal.

Behind the little world that man can plot and cultivate in apparent security is always the dark world of the unknown. We seem to control our actions, and select the agencies and materials to further our motives. But at times to our surprise and bewilderment there come upon us, out of this unreckoned region, complications or situations of whose significance we never dreamed. Every day we thus see our best purposes come to naught, owing to no direct fault of ours. But if the unknown brings one of these rare visitations of calamity, when life or what is as dear as life is involved, we call it Tragedy. A callous person may shrug his shoulders and say Fate or Destiny, and spell the words with capital letters. A pious soul may ascribe it to some remote fault, or sin, and call it retribution. But a thoughtful person will pause and consider the pattern and see if he can trace its meaning, even if he has to thrust in imagination beyond the flaming rampart of the stars and challenge

the justice of heaven itself. A daring venture, but the Greek tragic poet essayed the impossible and brought back a precious fragment of truth—a fragment that for us may become the corner stone of a temple.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, their names are a magic bead-roll whose central jewel is the unknown Homer. They are his own children, carrying to the newer world the ideas which he gave to his. But each has his own way of reading the tradition of his father, each sees in the central problem of human destiny something which is peculiarly his own. To trace the tragic idea from the first to the last is to uncover in a short half-century a whole history of human thought and a revolution in men's moral judgments.

## II. AESCHYLUS

"O grievous Fate, thou bestower of affliction, and thou, black spirit of Vengeance, verily a mighty power thou art." AESCHYLUS.

There is something wholly admirable in the personality of the poet Aeschylus as we catch the faint glimpses of him history affords. He had been a soldier in his youth, and fought in the battle of Salamis—a fact he never allowed others to forget, for he had carved on his tomb the simple phrase, "Here lies a soldier of Salamis." We catch a caricatured picture of him in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, austere and aristocratic, disdaining the more democratic and sensational poet Euripides, a trifle bewildered by the latter's malevolence, but as able to give an account of himself in a verse contest as he doubtless had been in the naval battle. But one sees him best in his plays.

He was the first of the new tragic poets. It was his reforms that had made of tragedy something more than an

acted lament of a hero's sufferings, by bringing to it a coherent plot with successive episodes and freely moving actors. In this he was the great innovator, and rightly deserves his eminence. But he was also a very great poet, and had a theme worthy of his power. He came just at the time when Athens began its wonderful progress after the final defeat of the Persian; and his poetry reflects all of this newly awakened pride in its power and confidence for the future. The traditions of the city had been amply justified by the event of the war, and now they were being daily justified anew by the peace and plenty and art that followed. Aeschylus had unbounded faith in human nature—in Greek human nature. In this he shows the traditional optimism of joyous youth.

Yet he writes some of the bitterest of all tragedies—the most notable of these is the *Agamemnon*. But the plot of the play is only one of the high lights in a story that for its complete revelation goes back three generations. It is a bitter account of a family drenched in the blood of kinsmen, of feuds that raised brother's hand against brother, and culminated in the fatal banquet tendered by Atreus to his brother Thyestes, of which the meats were the brother's own infant children. One by a miracle had been spared, Aegistheus; and him now Agamemnon, the son, will inherit as a secret but ever alert foe.

Agamemnon is a character wholly admirable. Just and magnanimous, he has been selected to lead the expedition against Troy. But fate is wayward like nature, the age is brutally superstitious, and he is compelled to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia before the army is allowed to embark. Who can question his motives? In his own eyes he is guiltless, and he forgets his wife. But Clytemnestra is a woman, and Iphigenia, her first child, is a pledge far dearer

than impersonal patriotism. So unwittingly, no, even generously, Agamemnon leaves behind him two deadly enmities that are not long in pooling their griefs and preparing against his homecoming.

There is something very fine one must confess in the character of this king; and Aeschylus never lets us forget his nobility. He has quite forgotten the feud he inherited, but allows his deadliest enemy free use of the palace, thinking magnanimously that his cousin will reciprocate kindness with courtesy. He is equally high-minded in his treatment of his wife, resolved, with commendable masculine egotism, that she share his patriotic motives and think of the loss of her daughter with noble fortitude. Has he not atoned for his guilt by the magnificent campaign in Asia; and should not she be proud to be the wife of the conqueror returning in triumph? It is not difficult for any male to feel a keen sympathy for the heroic prince, and forget with him in the press of business his duties to the family; it is equally easy for any woman to share the gnawing resentment of Clytemnestra against a husband who is everlastingly so wrapped up in his public duties that he fancies cruelty and a ten years' absence from home can be atoned for by soft words and a recitation of his public responsibilities.

The play opens precisely at the moment when the news of the conclusion of the war is flashed by the ancient beacon telegraph. The event, now long looked forward to, brings joy to all, but a joy tempered by hints of impending danger. Even the poor watchman, who all these weary years has strained his eye to catch the flicker of light or pillar of smoke that will tell the glad news, cannot refrain from a sigh of warning. The royal conqueror, when he returns, will discover what the poor slave dare not utter.



"But these stone walls know well,  
If stones had speech, what tale were theirs to tell."

The chorus of old men now files on the stage chanting a hymn that mingles joy with misgiving. It recites the iniquity of the war, the lust that prompted it, the gathering of the clans, the long delay while the thousand ships were held up by an angry goddess, the brutal sacrifice of Iphigenia—the poet never forgets or allows his audience to forget this crowning act of domestic violence. Slowly the poet is weaving his theme—"blood will have blood." Just here Clytemnestra enters. She is a majestic woman—half-sister to Helen, a queen in every right, and a wife worthy of her imperial consort. She is perfectly self-contained, calm when the whole court is thrilled with mixed anticipations. She is over-joyed, as all should be, that Troy has fallen and the honor of the house been vindicated, offerings must be made to the gods, and her triumphant husband must be welcomed in the manner he deserves. To the herald who brings the tidings she speaks with veiled irony:

"Go, bear my lord this prayer. that fast and far  
He haste him to this town which loves his name;  
And in his castle may he find the same  
Wife that he left, a watchdog of the hall,  
True to one voice and fierce to others all;  
A body and soul unchanged, no seal of his  
Broke in the waiting years.—No thought of ease  
Nor joy from other men hath touched my soul,  
Nor shall touch, until bronze be dyed like wool."

The chorus takes up the theme of the eternity of hate. The curse of Helen, mingled with the ancestral curse on the house of Agamemnon, a curiously paradoxical hymn as a prelude to the welcome of the world war hero. He now

comes forward in a scene that has had two acts of preparation. It is a striking scene, the note of fear in the last lines of the chorus, the triumphant emperor, bringing with him, as a startling reminder to his wife of his masculine heedlessness, the captive princess Cassandra. Here we have the naked dagger of tragedy revealed to all except the doomed man. Clytemnestra sees her cup of bitterness filled to overflowing by this last act of open treachery. Cassandra—it is quite unnecessary to add to her rôle that of seer—by feminine intuition grasps the full significance of the treacherous welcome. And Agamemnon, consciously modest in his triumph, follows his wife into the palace where Aegistheus is waiting. Such is the bare outline of the plot of the story. But it meant something vastly more than a mere story to the Athens of the early fifth century, and it can mean as much to us in these days after the Great War.

But to understand its full significance we must follow the story with its two sequels—the *Choëphoroe* and the *Eumenides*, or the *Libation Bearers* and the *Furies*.

The *Agamemnon* closes with the earnest prayer of Clytemnestra that this last shedding of blood in a just cause may end the misfortunes of the house of Tantalus, and that now the city may have peace.

“What we did

must needs be done.

And if of all these strifes we now may have no more, oh, I  
will kneel

And praise God, bruised though we be beneath the Daemon’s  
heavy heel.”

She and Aegistheus take over the government, and for some years there is not a cloud on the horizon. But young Orestes; the son, has been saved by his sister Electra and

sent away to be brought up in exile, brooding like Aegistheus on his revenge and biding his time. The sister Electra likewise waits until the season is ripe. At last the youth returns, and with righteous savagery slaughters his mother and her guilty paramour. But the end is not yet. Blood will have blood; and the youth terrified by conscience flies in an agony of remorse from the crime of matricide, pursued by the avenging Furies. And here the play ends. In the next play Athena, the goddess of wisdom and the patron goddess of Athens, brings the boy to trial before a human court, and there by a human act of purgation he is healed and given peace. Human law has allayed the feud, and human justice has intervened in a family curse that has devastated generations. Such is Aeschylus' answer to the ancient claims of the avenger of blood.

"Ah, take thought! Nor on our heads  
Rain the strange dew a spirit's anger sheds,  
Seed-ravening blight and mildews merciless,  
Till all the land lie waste in fruitlessness."

To Aeschylus tragedy comes with the substitution for the human ideals of justice of the wilder passion of hate. The ancient blood feud is also the theme of later tragedy in Shakespeare and Corneille, but never—not even in *Macbeth*—is the old theme so mercilessly displayed and its harvest of hate and tragedy so passionately set forth. "Blood will have blood" until there is no end to the story of man's undoing and his brutal revenge. The spirit of the avenger, the Alastor, stalks through these three plays, striking terror into even the noblest minded, and curdling the human kindness of even such admirable youth as Orestes and Electra. Nothing is more pathetic than their devotion to the cause of slaughter; poisoned youth, poisoned age, and

for victims the noblest and the best of the land. In what other drama or novel has the bitterness of destiny been more powerfully displayed, when it rides on the wings of hate, armed in what it considers justice?

There are no villains in these plays—not even the arch-conspirator Aegistheus. He is beside himself with fear in the *Choëphoroe*, and would strike in self-defense. In the *Agamemnon* he broods in the background—for since babyhood he has been taught the only rôle he is to fill. Clytemnestra is no cold murderess, as was Lady Macbeth. Her calculations are only that she may be revenged upon the man who has tortured her more than a wife and mother can bear; she was high-spirited and loving, once, and now her love is turned to hate and her high spirits arm her hand to the deed. Electra, her warm loving nature now warped out of affection for all save her brother, and living only that some day she may see the death agony of those she hates. What a waste of most excellent human nature wrought by violent passion!

How exquisitely Aeschylus handles the more heroic figures: the magnanimous Agamemnon, once leader of an immortal host and now coming back in longing for home and peace. He would be the very last to see wherein he had contributed to the ugly storing up of hatred and revenge. The very affection of his son and daughter is a picture of his character; and a lesser man would have been unworthy of the vengeance of such an admirable wife. And poor Cassandra, of all tragic feminine figures in Greek literature, save one, the most tragic; anticipating with her sensitive intelligence the doom that must fall upon her and her captor. She had lived through the fall of her city, she had seen the death of parents and brothers, she had seen her youngest sister sacrificed as a victim to the dead Achilles, and

finally looms this last and crowning disaster in which she too must be involved. There is nothing more pleading than her last agonies of grief and terror as she anticipates the fatal blow.

“One word, one dirge-song would I utter yet  
O'er mine own corpse. To this last shining Sun  
I pray that, when the Avenger's work is done,  
His enemies may remember this thing too,  
This little thing, the woman slave they slew!  
O world of men, farewell! A painted show  
Is all thy glory; and when life is low  
The touch of a wet sponge out-blotteth all.  
Oh, sadder this than any proud man's fall!”

All of the plays of Aeschylus deal with barbaric passions and their cruel harvest in blood and hate; and he offers as the solution the new reign of human reason and law. These clashes of human motives, in which each character fancies himself absolutely just: Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Aegistheus, Orestes, Electra, the Furies, produce tragedy in the hearts of those that hate and in the lives of all who inherit the curse. But there are human institutions that will take from the shoulders of the innocent as well as the guilty the load of the curse, and pronouncing an adequate sentence purge the land of bloodshed and to the tortured bring peace. These are the blessings of the new culture and its humane institutions. It was Athens, in the first flush after the hideous war with Persia, speaking to the world its great faith in humanity and human government. It is a thought, too, that we are slowly taking to heart in these days of dangerous reconstruction after the bitter hatreds of the late war. Aeschylus, the soldier of Salamis, points the way to his city through war to peace,—peace by the appeal to human reason. Agamemnon is the victim of his own social system, one of barbaric passion and barbaric vengeance. The whole

barbarous business of war is condemned. No private vengeance or public but is followed by its own offspring. This is a thought which even Homer had not quite caught—great as was his love for peace. There is no superhuman Fate here working mysteriously in human affairs, but a pattern for human life even the most obtuse cannot fail to read.

In the *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus attacks the noblest theme in all literature. The story of this hero was and is familiar to all. He was one of the gods of the earlier dynasty, who had assisted Zeus to the throne. After the new regime was established he offended by disobeying the command of the All Father when he relieved the lot of man. For this act of misdirected benevolence he was riveted by Zeus to the rock Caucasus where an eagle was sent to tear at his exposed liver. After centuries of this torture he was finally reconciled to Zeus. In nearly all modern interpretations of the play Prometheus is made the suffering protagonist of an unjust tyrant, punished for the sweetest of all human and divine traits, mercy for the oppressed. But to read this play as a protest against heaven's king and the justice of Zeus, is to forget that this is the second act only of a play that once had three, and that in the third Zeus and the suffering hero were reconciled. Would Aeschylus blaspheme Zeus, the god of justice, in order to exalt Prometheus, the god of mercy?

Rather is it not a plain allegory, with gods serving now for mortals in order that the cosmic significance of the poet's thought may be made manifest? Zeus is a young god, yet insecure on his throne. The demand for the present is order, to replace the anarchy of the older regime. When Prometheus offends—whatever the motives for Zeus' resentment—the god must suffer for his transgression. But shall justice forever be at odds with mercy? May not an act of justice be also an act of tyranny, even if the officer

of justice be Zeus himself? But justice should never be arbitrary power; it must, to be respected, be human and reasonable. Nor is the blaze of defiance of Prometheus at the end of this play justified. He had been convicted unjustly perhaps, like Socrates; but like Socrates, he should wait for justice to release him. And this was done in the last and lost play, where allegorically the mutual claims of justice and mercy are reconciled in the reign of intelligent law.

Is it not possible that Aeschylus is thinking, not of the myths of the gods and the tragedy of one Prometheus, but again of Athens, now embarked after the anarchy of the wars and the Tyrants in an effort to build a just constitution and establish human law? Is there not again in the conflicting motives of Zeus and Prometheus the ever present conflict in Athens; the tyranny of the majority, the caprice of misdirected reformers, all the puddle of politics that even our later day has not quite learned to do without? But beneath the allegory the poet is again announcing his optimistic faith in a rejuvenated Athens, a city of law and order as well as of mercy. Tragedy is a preventable thing, for if we can only succeed in discovering the best social institutions, the barbarisms of passion and tyranny will disappear in the clear reign of human reason. It was for this almost youthful trust in the ultimate perfectability of man and his institutions that I called Aeschylus, in spite of the drear pain of his tragedies, the most optimistic of great poets. His voice is a call to duty and peace.

“(Give good words, O young men and old!)  
Come with the Law that can pardon, the Judgement that knoweth,  
O Semnai, Semnai, watchers o’er people and land;  
And joy be a-stream in your ways, as the fire that bloweth  
A-stream from beacon and brand.

Outpour ye the Chalice of Peace where the torches are blending:  
 In Pallas the place it is found and the task it is done.  
 The Law that is Fate and the Father the All-Comprehending  
 Are here met together as one."

### III. SOPHOCLES

"Unhappy, bowed 'neath what disaster's yoke!  
 Thine own heart's nobleness hath ruined thee." EURIPIDES.

If Aeschylus is wholly admirable, Sophocles as we meet him in history, is genial and charming. When Aeschylus the veteran soldier was returning in triumph from battle, Sophocles the boy led the chorus of youths in joyous procession. He was honored repeatedly by high public office, and we catch a last glimpse of him, now as a very old man, in Plato's *Republic* still preserving the naïve charm of youth. If we may trust his statue, he was as attractive in appearance as in character. Life apparently touched him very gently, there is apparently not a trace of bitterness in his experience of the world in which he lived with men. How comes it that he sups so continuously with horror in his imaginative world of tragedy?

If Aeschylus was interested in the larger social implications of tragedy, looking at tragic situations rather as a clash of diametrically opposed motives and personalities, Sophocles discovers the germ of tragedy in some fatal paradox within the heart of personality itself. To Aeschylus the defects that bring about the tragic situations are due in the main to some maladjustment that a more reasonable and humane order in society could prevent. To Sophocles, on the contrary, even the best laws and social institutions cannot prevent a personality otherwise wholly admirable from displaying on occasion a fatal inner conflict whose result will spell misery and perhaps disaster. Humanity itself, and



## THE GOLDEN THREAD

the highest and best, carries within it a high explosive, like some mysterious chemical, that, given the proper occasion, will be touched off bringing ruin to all within its circle. Personality itself is a delicate and curiously adjusted mechanism, so we might continue the figure, useful or even admirable until some unpredictable motive enters and destroys the balance, and then what once seemed to guide and direct now becomes a sinister force for sheer destruction.

The tragic story of Ajax, Homer might have found nearly as interesting as that of Achilles. Next to the hero of the *Iliad* he was the foremost fighter among the Greeks. On the death of Achilles a contest was held for the possession of the hero's armor. Ajax put in his claim, but it was disallowed and the prize given to Ulysses. According to the old myth, Ajax out of anger and chagrin promptly went mad and was slain—the accounts of his death differ. The predicament of Ajax interested the philosophical mind of Sophocles, and the tragedy of *Ajax* is the result. Homer had given some of the main traits of his character, pride in himself, but not arrogance, supreme bravery, and more than a trifle of straightforward dullness, or to put it more kindly a lack of imagination. He was an excellent soldier, but not a supreme general. These qualities Sophocles accepts and embroiders upon in his interpretation of the personality of the hero.

Downright in his courage he is equally downright in his wrath when he realizes the slight put upon him by the generals Agamemnon, Menelaus and Ulysses. And as he is swept by the bitter passion of anger his mind, never too strong, becomes the prey of insane delusions. He stalks forth on his revenge, but instead of slaying his enemies, his sword is turned against the animals that are corralled

for the commissary of the army. The next morning, red with his butchering exploit, he comes to himself and realizes his shame. He, the man who had extolled his own prowess, now stained with the harmless blood of cattle, and his enemies all in paroxysms of laughter. His wife and child who strive to comfort him only add to his misery. His finest quality has become his chief enemy, to whom shall he explain, what apologies can he offer? There is nothing for this brave and deluded soldier except death. Such is the tragedy of Ajax, the first study in literature of the workings of emotional insanity.

The story of Philoctetes is not greatly unlike this of Ajax, only it ends with a calm reconciliation. This distinguished warrior, the former companion of Hercules and now the possessor of the divine bow and arrows, had been bitten by a serpent on the way to Troy. The wound was a grievous one, and because his suffering became an annoyance to the whole army he had been marooned on a deserted island. Now ten years later the army discovered that his artillery was necessary for the conquest of the city, and an embassy consisting of Ulysses and the young son of Achilles was dispatched to placate the old warrior. But—and this is the theme of the tragedy—what is going to be the state of mind of Philoctetes, what has happened to him, alone all these years with his suffering? Will he come when prayed by the very men who had so unfeelingly tossed him aside when he most needed human aid?

He is a pathetic picture, this half insane old warrior, nursing his grief and bursting into bitter cries as his pain gets beyond his control. But to the boy Neoptolemus he is all courtesy and affection, for in him he finds a friend, the first he has known for ten years. To Ulysses he is, on the other hand, all bitter hate. It is a play of love and

hate, of fierce resentment when he discovers that even the boy is joined in the plot against him, of his immediate response to the generosity of the young warrior, and of his later cure, as he catches the meaning of true affection. Philoctetes could be saved, for his mental malady was not beyond the reach of generous love; but Ajax was in a world alone, and there was no one who could break into his magic circle and offer the healing word.

These are the minor tragedies of Sophocles—minor only because they are Sophocles'. We may ignore Sophocles' minor tragedies whose theme is the disintegration of a simple personality through the insidious poison of a motive foreign to a downright and noble nature. But in his greater plays he takes the problem of far more complex personalities, the royal and resourceful Oedipus and Antigone his daughter. Here the tragic conflict becomes an inner one with an issue that is distinctly of moral significance. The story of Oedipus was a favorite with all, as well known to the Athenian child as that of David and Saul was to a child fifty years ago. To the Greek imagination he was an enigma that the myth made no effort to explain—the man who at birth had inherited the strange and ineffable curse, and who through no fault of his own committed the most deadly of sins. How shall the dramatist looking for true motives and a pattern in a life so inexplicable find something moral and intelligible in the story of this luckless man and his even more luckless daughter?

But let us first hear his story. King Laius of Thebes and his wife Jocasta had been warned that their child was fated to be the murderer of its father and husband of its mother. In despair they dispatched the baby, Oedipus, in the care of a faithful slave, to a neighboring mountain,

there to be abandoned to the wild beasts. But the child was pretty and the servant soft-hearted; and instead of obeying orders he gave it to a shepherd belonging to a far country. It was then carried to Corinth and there, attracting the attention of the childless king and queen, adopted and brought up as their own son. Again the oracle spoke to him, and in horror he fled his new home. In his hopeless wanderings at a crossroads he was jostled by a party accompanying an old man in a litter. He with high spirit resented the insult, the choleric old man leaning out of the litter struck at him, the youth struck back, too hard, and the old man was killed. It was a chance encounter, and these were barbarous days. The youth went on light-heartedly until he approached Thebes. There he was attracted by the news that a fearful monster was laying waste the city. Adventurous and self-reliant, he attacked and subdued the Sphinx and was hailed as savior by the city. Their king had recently disappeared, killed, it was rumored, by robbers, leaving no heir; and where could be discovered a better successor than this brave and resourceful youth? He accepted the throne. The queen was yet young and attractive. It was a love match, and political also doubtless, and they were married. The double curse was accomplished.

But this is not the tragedy. Tragedy is to be discovered in his mental reaction when Oedipus learns the full implications of his predicament. As Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, the poet is interested in the inner conflict when the character discovers the moral rottenness of the world in which unconsciously he has been living.

Ignorant of his predicament the King ruled for years wisely and prosperously. There are four children, two sons and two daughters. The king and queen are devoted

to each other, and he is the idol of all. Suddenly a plague smites the city, as one in the *Iliad* had smitten the camp of the Achaeans. And at precisely this point the play opens. The citizens wait upon the king in their terror beseeching him to save them again from affliction. He calms their anxiety by assuring them that already he has taken the first step and sent Creon to the oracle, his brother-in-law, the best man in the city; and even now he should be returning with the answer of the god. At this point Creon enters. He suggests a conference in secret, but Oedipus bids him speak before the assembled city. The answer is very brief, they must rid the city of the slayer of King Laius. But Oedipus with his keen sense of justice goes far beyond the words of the god, and, suddenly awakened to the fact that his first act on taking the throne should have been to uncover the murderer, pronounces a far-reaching curse against the murderer and *all* who had harbored him.

"If in this place men there be  
Who know and speak not, lo, I make decree  
That, while in Thebes I bear the diadem,  
No man shall greet, no man shall shelter them,  
Nor give them water in their thirst, nor share  
In sacrifice nor shrift nor dying prayer,  
But thrust them from our doors, the thing they hide  
Being this land's curse."

This is the first hint of the tragic instability of his fine mind. The second follows swiftly. He summons Tiresias the old seer to whom most secrets are known. The blind old man is reluctant to answer—not through fear, but through respect and affection for the helpless king. The prophet knows but will not be the instrument of fate, if he can help himself. But Oedipus, quick to catch a hint, persists in obstinate questioning, finally angers the seer,

and gradually draws out the truth. But truth at times looks like a malicious lie, and Oedipus is convinced of his rectitude. He puts two and two together and makes five. Tiresias has lied, bribed by Creon who has political ambitions, and the scene closes in violence. Jocasta, mother and wife, to ease the mind of the king proves the emptiness of prophecy, bares the family skeleton, and tells the story of the baby exposed and dead. What a charming character she is. Older than Oedipus she speaks as a mother, and yet with the loving affection of a wife and intimate companion. In a moment all seems clear. But there is yet one matter of suspense that must be cleared up.

- "OEDIPUS.      Woman, what turmoil hath thy story wrought  
                          Within me!    What up-stirring of old thought!  
 JOCASTA.      What thought?    It turns thee like a frightened thing.  
 OEDIPUS.      'Twas at the crossing of three ways this King  
                          Was murdered?    So I heard or so I thought.  
 JOCASTA.      That was the tale.    It is not yet forgot.  
 OEDIPUS.      The crossing of three ways!    And in what land?"

This troubles him and he tells his story of the death at the crossroads.

Slowly the net closes about the hero, and his frantic efforts to learn the truth only bring the inevitable answer closer, an answer his moral consciousness refuses to entertain. It resembles nothing more than a mortally ill patient describing symptoms supposedly of health whose fatal nature the quick physician instantly recognizes. A messenger from Corinth comes to summon him home, telling of his father's natural death. For a moment the cloud seems to lift and allow the sun to shine; but the tempest now falls in fearful earnest. Jocasta is the first to catch the truth; and she begs her husband to refrain from lifting

the veil. But he, now obsessed, demands the full story. The shepherd who carried him on his first journey is summoned, and reluctantly the facts are wrenched from him. How all love him, great and small, and strive to protect him from himself!

The final scenes are the tragic consequences of Oedipus' tragic quest. Jocasta has hanged herself. Oedipus in pain and bewilderment strikes out his eyes that he may no longer behold the clean face of nature, and goes forth a homeless man, to a fate worse than death.

"In God's name,  
Take me somewhere far off and cover me  
From sight, or slay, or cast me to the sea  
Where never eye may see me any more."

He takes a pathetic farewell of his two daughters—his boys are men and can fend for themselves, but his girls:

"Children, my wound  
Is yours too, and I cannot meet your gaze  
Now, as I think me what remaining days  
Of bitter living the world hath for you.  
What dance of damsels shall ye gather to,  
What feast of Thebes, but quick ye shall turn home,  
All tears, or ere the feast or dancers come?  
And, children, when ye reach the years of love,  
Who shall dare wed you, whose heart rise above  
The peril, to take on him all the shame  
That cleaves to my name and my children's name?  
God knows, it is enough! . . .  
My flowers, ye needs must die, waste things, bereft  
And fruitless."

The curse has been fulfilled—not a supernatural curse, but his own, pronounced light-heartedly but now involving him and his all in ruin. This is great tragedy.

Ten years and more have elapsed—Oedipus dies. His peaceful death and final clearing are beautifully shown us in the *Oedipus at Colonos*. There is something in this play the Middle Ages would have understood, the final beatification of Oedipus, his final knowledge that he had been a man more sinned against than sinning, and his sounder philosophy of life, gained through exile and sorrow, but serving as a glad illumination to his blessed grave. In the *Antigone*, the daughter who had shared her father's exile, is back again in Thebes with the king, her uncle Creon. She has been betrothed to Haemon the prince. But one of Oedipus' sons has made war on the city to assert his claim to the throne. The other has remained loyal. A battle of brother against brother has been fought, and both have been killed, each by the other's hand. This is Sophocles' rendering of the theme of the "sins of the fathers"; but the allegory was also of significance to all Greece with its fratricidal feuds and civil wars.

But the end is not yet. Creon has been righteously indignant at the stirring up of strife against the constituted authority of the state; and now at the beginning of the play of *Antigone* pronounces a heavy sentence against the body of the dead enemy brother. Every dishonor is to be shown to the corpse, and it is to be allowed to lie unburied. He will read a moral lesson to all such as lift a heel against the law. But this perfectly moral situation is morally abhorrent to the spirit of the sister Antigone. She abjures the brother's sin, but cannot forget the family bond. She owes, as the nearest of kin, a moral duty to her brother, to pay the last respects to his body, and thus to ease his immortal spirit. The dilemma is clear. Creon justly exclaims, "the worst of evils is to disobey". But her answer is likewise as just:



"Nor did I deem *thine* edicts of such force  
That they, a mortal's bidding, should o'erride  
Unwritten laws, eternal in the heavens.  
Not of today or yesterday are these,  
But live from everlasting, and from whence  
They sprang, none knoweth."

Even the prophet Tiresias condemns him: "He who persists in folly is a fool."

Her sister Ismene, younger and more docile, advises compliance with the law, as who wouldn't? Everything is against her except the pitiful corpse crying aloud to her conscience. One secret effort she makes is futile. Then bravely and openly she disobeys, is caught and condemned. Creon is no tyrant. He strikes even at his daughter-in-law, for he will have no one say that he has swayed the law in favor of his family. Even to the pleadings of his son he presents a deaf ear. The conclusion might have been anticipated in a situation so delicate with many conflicting passions. Antigone immured in a cave to starve hangs herself, Haemon commits suicide, his mother when she hears of her son's death also follows him; and at the end old Creon is left forlorn—a right pitiful object, the victim of his own zeal. At the conclusion the chorus breaks into the chant:

"O pray not, prayers are idle; from the doom  
Of fate for mortals refuge there is none."

Is this the answer of Sophocles to the pressing question of human fate? Or is the poet convinced that there is deep-seated in the human heart a fatal presumption, a motive that prompts man unduly to exalt himself and set his will against the gods? Is this the poet's meaning?

"So soaring far past hope,  
 The wise inventiveness of man  
 Finds diverse issues, good and ill:  
 If from their course he wrests  
 The firm foundations of the state,  
 Laws, and the justice he is sworn to keep—  
 High in the city, cityless I deem him,  
 Dealing with baseness: overbold,  
 May he my hearth avoid,  
 Nor let my thoughts with his, who does such deeds, agree!"

Can one justify the tragedies of Oedipus and Antigone?  
 Or looking still farther does Sophocles discover something  
 more moral or more intelligible in the fates of these wholly  
 admirable characters?

It is an interesting fact is it not?—that in all the tragedies  
 so far of Aeschylus and Sophocles we have no villains or  
 even part villains. There are no Iagos or Edmunds or  
 even Macbeths. One can understand the undoing of Lear  
 as due to his wicked daughter, of Othello to the diabolical  
 cunning of the Italian Iago, of Macbeth to his own un-  
 scrupulous ambition, but of Oedipus and Antigone—?  
 Here we have tragedy equipped with a self-starter.

A grosser nature than Oedipus', like a grosser nature  
 than Hamlet's, would have uncovered the secret, shrugged  
 his shoulders at fate, and—followed the bidding of the god.  
 Exile was all that was asked. A more stoical character  
 than Antigone might have buried her brother and quietly  
 taken the consequences; a less moral character would have  
 accepted the law and shrugged her shoulders at the im-  
 possibility of doing what her heart prompted. In all such  
 cases there would have been no tragedy. The tragedy,  
 again as in *Hamlet*, is due to the revelation that there is a  
 moral issue involved that suddenly becomes explicit and  
 shatters all peace of mind. It is a situation that lifts the

characters out of all customary habits of thought and thrusts them into the unknown where there is no light. The horror of the impossible wrings the heart of Oedipus with despair. His actions no longer are calculated, his reason is dethroned, and he becomes a creature only of moral instinct. It is the same with Antigone his daughter. Like her father she can coolly debate at the outset, but as the full intolerableness of her burden crushes her, her reason gives way to moral passion. Like Oedipus she finds herself utterly bewildered in a world suddenly gone stark mad. There is no escape.

Neither Antigone nor Oedipus, nor Ajax, nor any of the characters in Sophocles' tragedies are punished for the violation of any of the so-called laws of human nature or of society. It is impossible, without blasphemy, to think of the fate of his heroes as being either a retribution or the result of some blind curse. He refuses with all fortitude to regard human life as a record of a cosmic book-keeper. His gods are not certified accountants. Nor will he go over into the camp of the opposite party who regard human life as the prey of blind chance and spell tragedy as a glorified accident. His fine Greek sense of proportion and his fine intelligence spurn an idea of life as anything less than intelligible. The whole glory of the newly civilized Athens would be a protest against the brutality of dehumanizing man; and all experience would rise and proclaim as a lie any theory of tragedy as a retribution for sin. Somewhere between these impossible extremes must lie a truer and more human philosophy of man's sufferings.

The world, to Sophocles, in those days of optimistic Athens, is a moral world. But to most persons the large moral questions never present themselves. They live as most do to-day, following almost automatically the laws of

society and the state, and thus live secure. For law and convention is nothing more than the crystallization of reason, the amenities that man has discovered to make life safe from jars and discomfort. Nearly all difficulties may be ironed out, and a *modus vivendi* discovered through the agencies set up by man against just such occasions; and a true optimist like Aeschylus can look to a perfection of the technique of legislation—as some do to-day—that ultimately will bring the golden age and a heaven on earth. Many delightful poets have discovered a radiant pathway into this delectable region. The glory of Aeschylus is that he offered no easy solution—yet he had the faith that removes mountains.

But Sophocles saw deeper; and his faith is not like that of his robust and orthodox predecessor. For though his lesser characters, his Creons, his Ismenes, even his prophet Tiresias, proclaim the virtue of obedience, his greater characters discover within themselves the great paradox. There are moral situations that are morally insoluble. There is no provision that may be made for the predicament of an Ajax, an Oedipus, an Antigone, an Electra. Here the human reason is divided against itself, and the mind of man a battle field for contending armies both of which are right. Love, duty, patriotism, self-respect, these moral obligations by which men live are not always charts that point the safe way to desired havens; but often take no account of shifting currents and hidden reefs. The blinded king helpless in his agony, was never so moral as in his last immorality. The distracted daughter, rightly proclaiming the righteousness of her heart, is guilty of the death of those dearest to her. Ajax wrecks not himself alone but his pathetic wife and defenseless child. Life is at times a moral conflict and a moral victory also an immoral defeat.

But from the very jaws of defeat we rescue at least the pledge of intelligibility. Though we may from Sophocles learn how precarious often is our hold on the moral universe, we always have the lesser comfort of understanding the motives of man's defeat. Like cosmic nature, so human nature is the playground of intelligible forces. The law of moving bodies, though it may bring about the clash of opposing suns, can be read and the catastrophe predicted and understood. So in the moral world these human tragedies are not the prey of blind chance or brute Fate or an inherited curse. They are instead human, the result of human motives, and the results are of value if one would understand the wards and springs that govern human nature. Man may not escape his fate, though he may understand it. For he is moved by motives he can understand and which according to his moral nature he can submit to. His assertion of them proves his freedom and worth. Tragedy, thus contemplated, is a glorious vindication of the most cherished human prerogative. For it often means that man has abandoned the safe road of blind obedience; and human greatness, because it does reach beyond the secure and venture into the uncharted, is ever in danger of tragedy. But how admirable is humanity even in its moments of deepest perplexity and grief! Seen thus by Sophocles tragedy is a revelation of the divine in man. But in making the discovery he wrung from the human heart a cry that had a poignancy that even Homer never knew.

#### IV. EURIPIDES

"May men transgress when gods are thrusting on?" EURIPIDES.

Euripides is far less obsessed than his predecessors with the ideal of tragic nobility. If Sophocles adds a cubit to the

stature of man, Euripides insists upon seeing him eye to eye, and refuses to acknowledge a superior greatness in the mythical hero or heroine. Those awful figures looming in the mist of a past grandeur on a nearer approach become men and women as real as the figures that thronged the streets of Athens and their motives almost as commonplace.

To a sensitive soul there is no tragedy greater than the loss of one's faith, faith in a power that makes for righteousness and faith in humanity itself. The heroes of Sophocles are never finer than in their severest moments of torture, for in the sweat of their agony is lifted the terrible cry of humanity justifying its faith in something higher, something sweetly just whose gleam commonplace humanity can never perceive. Oedipus, Antigone, even Ajax, belong to the glorious army of martyrs, whose tragedy is a confession of faith. Humanity is nobler because these have suffered, and their death is a memento of man's moral salvation.

But poor Hippolytus and poor Phaedra and poor Theseus. Here is tragedy that offends every canon of justice and reveals a world suddenly gone stark mad—as the world will upon occasion even for the spectators of tragedy. But it was precisely this blight of madness that stirred the interest of Euripides. Theseus, now a king, once a soldier of fortune, had in his youth subdued Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, and of this swift romance had been born the boy Hippolytus. He has inherited the best traits of both his parents, is fond of the field and chase, but contemptuous of the charm of Aphrodite. Now after a tempestuous youth the king has settled down to the routine of middle-age and married Phaedra, the younger daughter of the king of Crete. But Phaedra comes of temperamental stock. Her mother, Pasiphæe, had not been quite a model; her sister, Ariadne, had compassed adventures that would make

a "thriller", one with Theseus himself in which the Minotaur, her half-brother, had been the victim. But Phaedra was good, modest, self-effacing, quite the woman, one might say, that would suit the subdued fancy of her now becalmed husband. Yet into this family of three, all trying to be good, with the best motives in the world, drops the bomb of stark tragedy. Phaedra falls in love with Hippolytus, and though he does not return her passion he is too high-minded to tell the truth to his father.

"How should I be so vile,  
Who even with hearing count myself defiled?  
Woman, I fear God: know, that saveth thee.  
For, had I not by oaths been trapped unawares,  
I had ne'er forborne to tell this to my sire."

How shall we explain that? The answer is the theme of the poet. Shall we blame the gods?

"Woe, woe! How God bringeth evil following hard on the track  
Of evil!"

Such an answer is no answer to the Greek mind. Better to deny the gods than to believe in their maliciousness. But to deny one's faith, as was said, is tragedy and treason. Is it any wonder, that to his age, as to later ages of faith, Euripides has been held to be a poet whose burden is too heavy for the human imagination to bear?

Even the lightest of his tragedies has about it an irrevocability that suggests a philosophy of malicious fatalism. It is the story of the unselfish wife, Alcestis. King Admetus had won the favor of the god Apollo, and in return, when his term of life had come, was granted a reprieve if only he could get someone to take his place. His aged father and mother refused and with reason, his friends protested, and finally only his wife was willing to make the sac-

rifice. All this is as beautiful as sentimental, and even a modern "movie" might grow eloquent over a wife's similar devotion. It is the turn, however, that the poet gives to the motives that makes the play one of the world's choicest mysteries of domestic affection. When the final pangs of parting come, both husband and wife have their eyes opened—she to the horror of death, he to the fact that he has become her slayer as remorselessly as though his own hand had wielded the knife; and the sweetest of human affection is poisoned with the bitterest of disillusionment. Even the final and miraculous rescue that reunites them cannot take away its savor. Tragedy to Euripides becomes an unmitigated horror.

The blackest of his tragedies, unrelieved by one spark of generous import, is the *Medea*—the bleakest tragedy of human nature twisted and thwarted by human suffering into outrageous passion and unnatural revenge. Medea is the paradox of most generous affection by revenge turned into the bitterest monster of hate. Jason, the soldier of fortune, had wooed and won her when at the head of the Argonauts he had sought for the Golden Fleece in the barbarian land of Colchis. By her magic aid he had subdued its guardians and gained the prize; by her magic aid he had escaped the wrath of her brothers—out of love for him she slew them; by her magic aid he had achieved a wholesale revenge upon his own rebellious people; all this and more he owed her. Now settled finally in the kingdom of Corinth, he sees the opportunity of achieving a royal bride and kingship, and basely, politician-like, strives to calm the startled Medea by the promise of an ample and noble settlement for her and her two sons, his children. Divorce! and for her, who has given up home and a royal family for him; for her, who has stained her hands in blood for him



—a quiet dignified divorce for Medea, the daughter of Colchis—divorce, and her two fatherless sons, and Jason kinging it with a Corinthian commonplace queen!

A masterless passion sweeps over her, driving her into madness. She has loved to frenzy and murder; she can hate no less. All hell is let loose in her. Fragment by fragment the world in which she lives crashes in ruin, burying the bride, the king, her own children. Jason alone is left to contemplate the havoc of his own treachery, and Medea—lone Medea, where can a woman like Medea find rest? Hate like this is immortal—as is love—and leaves a world disillusioned and dry-eyed, empty as last winter's grate with its charred embers of what was once warmth and love. Again Greek literature has achieved the impossible. Achilles, finding revenge as empty as the glory of war is meaningless; Oedipus, self-blinded, an exile to his own sense of moral rectitude; Prometheus, bitterly in protest against divine injustice; Medea, the forlorn victim of her own affection and hate. There will not be many in all the late centuries of all literature to put beside these triumphs of the imagination. But of all these characters, that of Medea is the most desolate. Oedipus has his moral nature, which at last is to discover peace in death; Prometheus retains his unswerving faith in cosmic justice; and he is to achieve peace; what mirage of peace can ever tempt the eye of lost Medea? We cannot hate her and with Jason pronounce against her this bitter curse:

"Thou living hate! Thou wife in every age  
Abhorred, blood-red mother, who didst kill  
My sons, and make me as the dead: and still  
Canst take the sunshine to thine eyes, and smell  
The green earth, reeking from thy deed of hell;  
I curse thee!"

For have we not also listened to her frenzied grief over her own children's fate?

"Oh, darling hand! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,  
And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,  
May you be blessed, but not here! What here  
Was yours, your father stole. . . . Ah God, the glow  
Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch; and Oh,  
Sweet scent of childhood. . . . Go! Go! . . . Am I blind?"

Nor can we quite catch the detachment of the chorus and its praise of moderation:

"And thus my thought would speak: that she  
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known  
Is nearer to felicity:  
Unlit she goeth and alone,  
With little understanding what  
A child's touch means of joy or woe,  
And many toils she beareth not.  
But they within whose garden fair  
That gentle plant hath blown, they go  
Deep-written all their days with care."

For it is emotional insanity, murderous while loving, that we see displayed. Frenzied and yet coolly calculating—a strange paradox, yet convincing.

It is perhaps for this reason that Aristotle called Euripides the most tragic of poets; but it was for the same reason that Aristophanes charged him with undermining faith in the gods. What avail are gods in a world of such tragedy; or how can gods be revered if on occasion they lead mortals into such snares as belimed Hippolytus or Admetus or Hercules or Agamemnon—and the list can be extended to include nearly all of his plays. Rather more profitable is it to speak with open hostility and confound the gods with the maliciousness of nature itself.

There are no gods, only hostile powers of nature within the souls of the best. Safety consists in a life of narrow moderation. On this narrow ledge man may live secure; but below is the abyss ever yawning for its victim. The slightest occasion may lose for man his precarious balance, and his fate is irrevocable. This is not quite to confound man with the unreasoning brute, nor does it destroy human responsibility—so long as he can maintain his precious balance. But the evil lurks unsuspected in the heart of man himself, like a bacterium or poison or malignant growth, that with the proper inducement displays its fatal potency, and no one is to be counted safe, for of its nature or coming no one may guess.

Modern psychology has learned to call this region in which lurks the unsuspected evil the subconscious; but no modern psychologist has been more successful in exploring its depths. Take the story of Hercules, driven from one danger to the next until his whole life was a series of prodigious wrestlings with death. His most alarming adventure was his harrowing of hell and the capture of the infernal whelp, Cerberus. He had left his wife and children in the care of his friend and of his father. Now he is returned from the exploit harassed in body and soul, and from its horrors seeking recuperation in his home. And what does he discover? his friend defeated, his father in refuge in a temple, and the usurper, Laicus, seeking to seize his wife. Overburdened already, the mind of the iron warrior gives way. Like Medea, there is the surge of emotional insanity with its delusions. He lives over again the conflict in hell with its monsters, and in a rage falls upon them, and destroys his wife and children. It is not a pretty picture—this of the madness of a popular hero. The Athenian audience can well be seen veiling its eyes and

putting fingers in its ears to shut out the blasphemy. The thing that he was striving to forget—the horror of his last war—rising like a deeper blackness upon the horror of his wife and children in peril. These are situations no social or moral code can take into its purview. It is the human rising up against the human—an anarchy whose only solution is despair. When the deeps are unchained calling unto the deeps there is little that human reason or human institutions can do for bulwark against the deluge.

It is contrasts like these, when passion is pitted against instinct, as with poor *Phaedra*; or insanity against reason and mother love, as with *Medea*; or a last passion unchained after the soul had endured horrors, as with *Hercules*; or love of life and husband set against the despair of death as with *Alcestis*, that Euripides patiently and with great poetry so abundantly explores, as had never been done before and has been done only once since. He wrote a play on the story of *Oedipus*; one wonders what new twist he gave to the motives of *Sophocles*. Only *Shakespeare* has been great enough to do things in the manner of both *Sophocles* and *Euripides*. For if the essential problem of *Oedipus* is not dissimilar from that of *Hamlet*, the agony of *Othello* or of *Macbeth* is the thing that *Euripides* would also have understood. But when the Frenchman *Racine* tried his hand in the manner of the master *Euripides*, he gave us something far different and lower.

But now one can understand why the story came to be repeated that the poet was a hater of women and laughter. One cannot laugh often when one feels the perilous safety of the narrow ledge of human institutions. *Dante* who likewise explored the abyss, and *Virgil* who knew a thing or two also about the desolation wrought by passion, and *Milton*, who sought "to justify the ways of God", and

failed, are never pictured as lovers of laughter. The other charge may be dismissed. He chose woman for his leading character in tragedy, for in woman the fatal conflict of passion with passion is a more moving one, especially if the woman is good; and Euripides' heroines—the critics to the contrary—are good, and some of them noble. If they sin it is because love prompts them; and if they love sinfully, as did Phaedra, their modesty strives to hide it. And Iphigenia at Aulis might well claim the sisterhood of the world's resolute and noble heroine martyrs. One must go far to find her equal.

But Euripides has also gone far toward exploding the ideal of heroic nobility. Most of his heroes emerge as shabby substitutes for the magnanimous characters of the myths. Agamemnon becomes a vacillating seeker after military glory; his brother Menelaus is not much better than a vote-getting ward politician; Jason is a "mucker". There is something almost malicious in the way the poet goes about smashing the idol of greatness; and in its place we see greed, selfishness, hypocrisy, snobbishness, time-serving sycophancy, and downright fraud. This is flawed human nature of a kind that neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles would have found available; but something that modern fiction and biography returns to with increasing eagerness. For Euripides strove to see human nature as it is, stripped of all heroic borrowings, and not made gigantic by the mists of romance. His age with the new sciences had probed the motives of human conduct and sought for the secret of human personality. Here is the answer Euripides makes to this search. Lo, the human animal is as was Admetus or Hercules, Medea or Phaedra, Jason or Oedipus; and as were their motives, as they strove with passion or instinct, so is all humanity—when once

stirred to its unsuspected depths. He at least will not make his judgment blind; nor will he be beguiled by phrases or high-sounding theories about human perfection.

Under the stress of emotional disturbance, his characters break as lesser persons do in daily life. The motives, too, are as homely as are the characters. Jason to make a political marriage, wishes to cast off a wife who is a foreigner and not quite socially "correct". Hercules, on his return from a terrible voyage, discovers his family in worse terror. Admetus too late discovers the affection of his wife and his love for her. These are things even the lowest citizen of Athens could understand. They are likewise the theme of modern life, the themes likewise of the stories in every newspaper. In this way Euripides brings tragedy out of the clouds and from the mountain tops down to the level of humble humanity. Love between parent and child, between husband and wife; hatred, revenge, despair, growing out of tortured love; these are as homely as life itself—and for tragedy as significant.

But Euripides likewise avoids the vice of vulgarity—the trait so abundantly manifested in so much modern realism that seems to be following his example. If the example of Medea or of Alcestis in the last analysis is homely, it is far from vulgar or banal. Though the magic of the old heroism has dissolved, it has not left as its dregs the ill-smelling "naturalism" of much of later fiction or drama. His heroes or heroines who are most human are never sordid, as are many of the characterless things in Gorky or O'Neill. The problem may be sex, as it usually is, but it is not sex that has become an obsession. Even Phaedra is clean, morally and physically, when set beside the sex-obsessed females of D'Annunzio. Even at their very worst, the characters of Euripides present a tragic nobility

—as do also those of Shakespeare; we can admire them even in their wickedness.

This is no more than to say that, though he was charged with being a hater of laughter, Euripides was no cynic. His studies of the tragic emotions and conflicts in men and women, and their physical and mental anguish, though objective, were prompted by no hatred or contempt of human nature. The agony of Phaedra, loving not wisely, was not written by one who hated the goddess Aphrodite; nor is Medea condemned. His characters are sympathetic, for he has for them the first sympathy. More than this—and here he transcends all the greatest of modern realists—his characters do reveal an intelligible plan. They are not mere studies in certain “flowings of temperament”. Their plan or design may be faulty, like a building designed by an architect whose hand has slipped, and hence their tragic dilemma; but there is a plan, as there must be in all that is rational and human. More than this, the characters would be moral if circumstances permitted, but the faultiness of their plan, the very paradox of their natures, is a fatal bar. Their temperaments forbid it.

Euripides is a realist—perhaps the greatest realistic poet that has ever been given to the world. But his realism does not leave the reader depressed. For even in the most dreary of his plays, as in the most painful, there is discovered some compensation, as there is a compensation in all great tragedy. Even Medea leaves the world better for having lived; and Hercules’ mad slaughter is not utterly without some gleam of hope. For out of it we discover truths about human nature that are without price for the telling.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The conclusions that Euripides discovers for his plays are as tantalizing a little problem as the lover of his tragedies can fancy. He believes in

Such and so varied a thing is Greek tragedy; Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, each inheriting the Homeric tradition, and each translating it into the vivid life of Classical Greece. They have not surpassed their master, the epic scope of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is a panorama that was never attempted again but once. But they are working now with the advantage of a larger and more complex life about them, with a world whose horizon has been pushed beyond the Pillars of Hercules and the Cimmerian Land, and with a science that has successfully challenged the secrets of nature. Though Greek civilization has developed and matured in the centuries, it yet preserves its love of the objective and the rational; though it may have lost some of its faith in the gods, it yet preserves its faith in human nature; and though the fate of humanity is still as baffling as ever, these poets push their imaginations as resolutely as their master to the task of unraveling its intricate pattern. Without their fresh curiosity there could be no philosophy, no science, and no trust in human institutions. Without their motive history would lose much of its charm and art its human ideal. Homer remained Homer, and his book the founding of a tradition; but it was the popular Greek tragedy that interpreted the ancient myth and applied it to the life of the man in the streets of Athens and of all Europe.

the gods? He believes not in the gods? At any rate in fully half of his conclusions a god comes brazenly on to the stage or its upper works and with a supernatural gesture brings the business to a conclusion. Is it possible that Euripides was not interested in the manner in which his tragic situations worked themselves out? Did he take to the *Deus ex Machina*, as a host passes cigarettes or coffee after a dinner, as a polite way of telling his guests that the main courses are over? At least they were popular with those who like to see realism followed by a heavenly miracle. These miracles, however, never touch the main issue.





## IV. THE MYSTERY OF LAUGHTER

ARISTOPHANES

"For hither has come a shrewd old file,  
Such a deep old file, such a sharp old file,  
His thoughts are new, new deeds he'll do,  
Come here, and confer with this shrewd old file."

ARISTOPHANES.

TURN to the pages of the English *Punch* or the French *Le Rire* or the German *Fliegende Blätter* (though the last is a trifle heavier at times) of only a few years back now, during the Great War to be accurate, and glance at the comic war jests and the comic soldier cartoons. There are the familiar trenches, the tangled skeins of barbed wire, the steel helmets, bayonets, bombs, empty strawberry jam tins, and all the rest of the infernal stuff of which war is made; but with a difference. The Tommy or the *poilu* is neither tragic nor sordid. As I write I have before me a collection of just such cartoons, drawn when the tragedy was in its fifth act; but nowhere is there a hint of the bloody business of mangled bodies or shivered nerves; no hint of the theme of war novels and war dramas that now color the ghastly business with lurid animal lust or forlorn human hope. The nearest one comes to pathos is when the new cockney officer bids a long farewell to his "bowler"; the nearest to tragedy when an exploding shell endangers the precarious balance of a trench coffee pot. It is in this

way that comedy by a laugh clears the mind, for a moment even, of the pressing horrors of the present. Great is the power of comedy!

The ability to laugh. It is the one property, says Rabelais, that is peculiar to man. And he might have added, for he knew, that a man is known by what he will laugh at. Athens in the years between 420 and 380 B.C., nearly forty years, laughed luxuriously at the comedies of Aristophanes and the succeeding generations have joined in the hearty uproar. The Greek laughed, too, like the stout cartoonist of our own times, when the skies of his country were overcast with the blackest of clouds. His most rollicking fun in the *Frogs* was played almost on the day when the disgrace of Athens in the Greek civil war was complete. The poet was a patriot also, again like the cartoonist, who was in his way doing his bit for his country, but he was something else. There is something tawdry and almost pathetic in the sincere but feverish efforts of *Punch* to make people forget the grim terror; the laugh is almost hysterical; but Aristophanes' laugh is full-throated, and even the oblivion of the war and of the motives that then marred men has not lost for us the zest and meaning of his comedy. The Greek poet's laughter is bigger and more significant; its immediate cause is forgotten, but its meaning is as true today as when the first chorus of frogs burst into the eloquent "Brekeke-kesh, koash, koash" on the stage in Athens. What was Aristophanes laughing about? It is a pertinent question.

Aristophanes would laugh at anything. In Plato's *Symposium* there is a situation as realistic as it is dramatic. Agathon, a young and popular tragic poet, has won his first victory and invites his friends to help him celebrate. Among the group are Socrates, the philosopher, another favorite

with the young bloods of Athens, and Aristophanes. The conversation is set on the all-absorbing question of love, its nature and consequences. A most eloquent monument to the god has been erected by one of the speakers. Aristophanes interrupts by a violent attack of hiccoughs—all had been generous in their libations—and then proceeds to a definition and description of the passion—its metaphysical and ontological and teleological nature. There is nothing quite like it in all literature, except possibly in the wildest caprices of Rabelais. Aristophanes laughed at Socrates in the theatre in his play, *The Clouds*; he laughed at the ways of women in politics in the *Parliament of Women*; he laughed at the ridiculousness of war and panoplied heroes in play after play; he laughed at the morose Euripides on more than one occasion; he laughed at constitution makers, at theorists who imagined the world can be made over in a night, at lawyers, at socialists, at capitalists; his was a nature that could perceive the ridiculous even in the gods. Aristophanes could and did laugh at everything; his range is matched only by that of Shakespeare. And because sane laughter is a human trait, the most significant human trait on occasion, there is value even for us in his universal comedy.

It was again the creative imagination of the Greek that invented comedy; and again to illustrate the fact that all literature comes from the motives of life itself, one must, as in tragedy, look to the seasonal village festivities for its origins. The scene is not difficult to reconstruct. There is just one such brief picture in one of Aristophanes' own comedies.<sup>1</sup> The war with Sparta has devastated the whole of Attica, and in resentment, the plain farmer, Dikaiopolis, resolves that he at least will preserve his sanity in a world

<sup>1</sup> *The Acharnians*, line 240 et seq.

gone war mad, and make a separate peace with the enemy. When the ceremony is concluded, he goes in for a private celebration—he, his slave, his daughter, and his wife—it is his whole household. His slave carries the emblem of fertility, his daughter the offerings to the god, his wife on the roof of the family hut is the audience and chorus, and he, the chief celebrator, drenched in the newly broached wine, sings at the top of his voice a song of ribald satire.

“For I have made a private treaty  
And said good-bye to toils and fusses,  
And fights, and fighting Lamachuses.

Far happier 'tis to me and sweeter,  
O Phales, Phales, some soft glade in,  
To woo the saucy, arch, deceiving,  
Young Thratta (Strymodore his maiden),  
As from my woodland fells I meet her  
Descending with my fagots laden,  
And catch her up and ill entreat her,  
And make her pay the fine for thieving.”

Jest and satire, as common as suffering and lament, and as much a part of the life of the early community as of the life to-day—the two contrasted and all-inclusive attitudes toward life. Thus early, long before history made its first record, these had become fixtures in the liturgy of the village life. All that was needed was the larger complexity of a developing civilization with its larger self-consciousness and its means for giving them artistic form, to discover for us the blossom and fruit of tragedy and comedy. And this was precisely what was found in Athens; and its promise for comedy was abundantly fulfilled. Athens, though the leading city of the world, was yet a community where the old informality and sociability of the village was yet not

forgotten. People lived on the streets and in the market place and in the plazas before the temples and gymnasiums. Everyone knew everyone else. Homes were only to sleep in—it was before the day of privacy and the boast that one's house was one's castle. The free jest on the comic stage and the generous satire could have then a personal stamp that our later comedy may never hope to recover. Aristophanes can flay the pretensions of the demagogue Cleon, with his victim seated in the chief magistrate's chair in the front row, and yet go unpunished. He can caricature out of all semblance the popular philosopher Socrates; and Socrates, seated in the audience, rises that his neighbors and friends may compare the likeness. He can talk of his contemporary poets, jesters, athletes, priests, orators—anyone whose name is on everyone's lips—and expect a gratified response. Comedy in Athens in this day was as free-spoken as a newspaper and as brilliant in satire and jest as Thalia, the genius of mischief.

But there is more than the scattering of the sparks of wit in Aristophanes. Such audacity of repartee, never to be surpassed, tells only part of the story of the worth of this poet to his time and to us. For example here is something from the *Acharnians*. Dikaiopolis has made his separate peace with the enemy, and is now the only man in Athens whose steps are of his own choosing. At once he is attacked by Lammachus, the generalissimo, armed cap-a-pie. Undismayed, the hero picks up a skewer and pancake and flourishes them as sword and shield.

"LAM. Boy, boy, take down the spear, and bring it here.

DI. Boy, take the sweetbread off and bring it here.

LAM. Hold firmly to the spear whilst I pull off  
The case.

DI. And you hold firmly to the spit.

LAM. Boy, bring the framework to support my shield.

DI. Boy, bring the bakemeats to support my frame.

LAM. Bring here the grim-backed circle of the shield.

DI. And here the cheese-backed circle of the cake.

LAM. Bring me a casque, to arm the outer man.

DI. Bring me a cask to warm the inner man.

LAM. With this I'll arm myself against the foe.

DI. With this I'll warm myself against the feast."

Nor is his use of the fantastic the whole story of Aristophanes's worth. The *Frogs* is the story of a journey to the lower world and a burlesque of all its weird and inconceivable adventures. The *Clouds* uses for its chorus draped figures to allegorize the airy nothingness of the new philosophy. The *Birds* takes us to a middle region between heaven and earth to the home of the birds where we make strange acquaintances with hoopoes, plovers and nightingales. The *Peace* takes us on a journey to heaven on the back of a monster scarab—the jest here is almost grossly untranslatable. This *gamin de génie* ransacks the garrets of Greek imagination to dress out the grotesque and fantastic.

But though the situations are ridiculous and utterly unreal, and the dialogue a shower of meteors, he uses these only that he may explore some thought, some popular idea, and teach common sense by laughter. His comedies are an appeal for sanity; but in a novel manner. The old prophets and teachers had scolded and threatened, and burned the brimstone of their wrath; this new prophet goes about his mission of proclaiming the vanity by which most men live by holding it up to robust ridicule. "Indignation" may "make the verses", but it is an indignation that never gets red in the face and provokes its victim to anger; there is no answer to the jesting satire of Aristophanes, except that

of the whipped cur. The poet tells of the indignation of Cleon, when the poet as a boy of nineteen assailed him in his first comedy. Doubtless the old and tried politician longed to birch the precocious collegian who jested hilariously with things beyond his years. But the spirit of comedy was beyond the grip of even the first man in the state; for the people perceived that beneath the unmannered farce there was a telling theme, and they liked it, for the poet's hand tickled as it smote.

The range of theme in the comedy of this poet is as wide as the social and political life of Athens and Greece. For nearly twenty years of his activity, Athens was engaged in the suicidal war with Sparta. It was natural, therefore, that he should turn and re-turn to the theme of war and peace. Aristophanes was no pacifist as we use the word to-day; but this fratricidal war, with the world looking on like a crowd of vultures, waiting its advantage; this war breeding hate, destroying art and industry, undermining the political health of all; how he lashes the ignobility, the insanity, the grotesque impossibility of it in play after play. It was the theme of his third play, when the war was yet all favorable for Athens; and in it he draws a fantastic picture of the chiefs of the war party in the charcoal burners, the gruff Acharnian peasants. Surely if such grotesque persons can only be silenced, all Athens can celebrate a peace, like the resolute countryman Dikaiopolis. A rude peasant can teach them the way, and then all can go about their own business and the city can flourish as of old.

He comes again to the theme in that amazing and daring play the *Lysistrata*, a *jeu d'esprit*, yet also one of the world's greatest comedies. The men have failed to make peace—there is something fatally stupid about the masculine intellect and the masculine spirit of contention. Well, the

women will see to it, take matters into their own hands, and bring about an end of the irrational business. They are tired of having fathers, husbands, lovers, sons, away from home and getting themselves mutilated and killed. The whole thing is too ridiculous, and can be ended with an easy resolve which *Lysistrata*—a real heroine—finally persuades the women to make. The play is fantastic—perhaps impossible—though the suggestion is not wholly different from one made by the prophet Ruskin. But *Lysistrata* succeeds—in the play; she might have succeeded in real life. Unfortunately, if our evidence is correct, the women of Greece did not go to the theatre, and they failed to hear their advocate.

Much later, when Athens was wrung with the last agony before the final defeat, Aristophanes wrote the most ludicrous and fantastic and yet most thoughtful of all his comedies. Here the question is no longer peace; the time for an honorable peace has now passed, and the enemy is already gloating over the final writhings of its victim. Can Athens be saved; can a word to the wise yet be spoken that may avert the omen? It is time to take stock of all the country's resources, to hearten the citizen against the struggle, to cheer the faint-hearted, to jettison everything that may endanger the state, to bring concord where there have been divided counsels, to make diligent search for the worthy leader, to seek a return to the virtue of the past and the simple faith of their fathers—all this and more is in this *sursum corda* that externally at least is the most rollicking of extravagant farce, the *Frogs*.

The very episodes as they unfold one by one are unsurpassed by even the wildest of modern comic opera. Gilbert and Sullivan, though they knew a thing or two, never approached in fancy this topsy-turvy land; and also never saw



how to turn nonsense into the most deadly of earnest. The God Dionysus, the patron of the arts, has become disgusted with all contemporary tragic poets. Only the best is capable of stemming the tide of evil manners and loose living that threatens destruction to the state. Mark this—the state is being destroyed, not by the foreign enemy, but by the break-up of the old morale of the citizens—they have become soft, and the time demands men with sinews. He will go to Hades to bring back a worthy poet, or at least to gain his advice.

The journey to the infernal world is no pleasure jaunt—it had been made by the divine hero Hercules ages ago, and the young god will disguise himself as the old hero, lion's hide, club, and all. Clad in this ridiculous splendor, the pot-bellied dwarf knocks at the door of the hero, demanding news of the road:

“ . . . the acquaintances  
That received you there—(the time you went before  
—For the business about Cerberus)—if you'd give me  
Their names and their directions, and communicate  
Any information relative to the country,  
The roads,—the streets,—the bridges, and the brothels,  
The wharves,—the public walks,—the public houses,  
The fountains,—aqueducts,—and inns, and taverns,  
And lodgings,—free from bugs and fleas, if possible,  
If you know any such.”

All this is sheer foolery. So is the next scene with the boatman Charon, who must row the god over the river Styx, and the chorus of frogs that chant the time for the rowers:

“Brekeke-kesh, koash, koash.  
Friends and Frogs, we must display  
All our powers of voice today;  
Suffer not this stranger here,  
With fastidious foreign ear,

To confound us and abash.  
Brekeke-kesh, koash, koash."

Aristophanes is getting his audience well in hand by means of this well disposed farce. On the other side, Dionysus and his slave Xanthias, the great-grandfather of all the rogues in drama and novel from Menander and Plautus to Shakespeare and Cervantes and Molière, have their first infernal adventure. It is the night-hag, the Empusa, the horrid creature that turns men's blood to ice; and they take it as would Falstaff and Sancho Panza. Then while the audience is wiping its eyes of the tears of laughter comes the first great and sobering appeal of the poet. It is a chorus of mystics who pass across the stage chanting slowly the most signally Athenian cult—the Eleusinian mysteries—the liturgy that made the Athenian citizen, the heart and soul of the Athenian patriotism.

"Keep silence—keep peace—and let all the profane  
From our holy solemnity duly refrain;  
Whose souls unenlighten'd by taste, are obscure;  
Whose poetical notions are dark and impure;

. . . . .

Who delight in buffooning and jests out of season;  
Who promote the designs of oppression and treason;  
Who foster sedition, and strife, and debate;  
All traitors, in short, to the stage and the state;  
Who surrender a fort, or, in private, export  
To places and harbours of hostile resort,  
Clandestine consignments of cables and pitch.

. . . . .

Therefore  
Evermore  
With your voices and your bodies  
Serve the goddess,

And raise  
Songs of praise;  
She shall save the country still,  
And save it against the traitor's will;  
So she says."

The contrast—the frolic with the Empusa, and this pure appeal of the secret cult of Athens. Every face in the audience would instantly freeze into sobriety. It is a call from the prehistoric past, a call to keep inviolate the hearth of Attica.

Then lest he hold the note too long and lose the effect, again the deft farce. Changes are rung on the grotesque adventures in love, cookery, and torture that one may expect in this realm of the departed. A chic serving maid invites the hero to a banquet served by her mistress—she has waited long for his return, but will greet him with added warmth. Scarcely has the god gathered himself for this welcome diversion before the hostess of a roadside inn falls upon him with all the kitchen cutlery, for had he not on his previous visit eaten her out of house and home and left with reckoning unpaid? She will teach gods ever wandering out of their sphere the laws of infernal hospitality. All this and more—and then again the second apparition of the chorus—this time the theme is more solemn—the present dangers, the only way of escape. O Attica, Attica, shall all be lost in the crisis only for lack of right knowledge?

"Muse, attend our solemn summons,  
And survey the assembled commons.

. . . . .

It behoves the sacred Chorus, and of right to them belongs,  
To suggest the best advice in their addresses and their songs."

“—Time it is—and long has been, renouncing all your follies past,  
 To recur to sterling merit and intrinsic worth at last.  
 —If we rise, we rise with honour; if we fall, it must be so!”

The play now, when it has run more than half its course, comes to the main theme. Can a poet be found who can re-inspire the state with its former virtue? A heavy burden, this, for a poet—for the poet; for of all the great poets of Athens Aristophanes alone is left. The contest is between the new poetry as it was practiced by Euripides and the old by the soldier Aeschylus. Who of the two is the more worthy to guide Athenian morals in these dangerous days? This scene has been read as a piece of gratuitous literary criticism thrust into an otherwise excellent drama; and literary criticism it is, but not of a variety to which we usually attach the word. There is a fervor here that betrays the interest of the author. He is calling the people away from the poetry he sincerely believes has betrayed them and lost them their manhood. There is no malicious arraignment of Euripides and an exaltation of Aeschylus in this trial, where each poet strives to define his ideal of poetry, and his belief in its power to fashion a man, citizen, and soldier. “Give us Aeschylus and his masculine virility and his piety and we may yet save Athens”, we can fancy Aristophanes saying. It is the poet’s plea for the power of true poetry at a time of crisis.

“Now may the powers of the earth give a safe and speedy departure  
 To the Bard at his second birth, with a prosperous happy revival;  
 And may the city, fatigued with wars and long revolution,  
 At length be brought to return to just and wise resolutions;  
 Long in peace to remain. . . .”

Yet the poet also never forgets his mission, that of the comic poet as distinguished from the orator or prophet. He

preaches, but through the contagion and catharsis of laughter. No scene in the play is so exquisitely comic as that when the two poets are brought to stand before a huge balance—all things are possible in Hades—and made to recite their verses into the pans to test their weight. Would that some modern ingenious psychologist could devise a similar apparatus for our use to-day on earth! It could be put to abundant use. The attack on Euripides is not malicious, but calculated for the needs of the times. Aristophanes is not the intolerant moralist—we have discovered as much in Plato's humorous picture of him in the *Symposium*. But now he has the moralist's duty, and he proceeds to do it in the comedian's manner, by making the new poetry and the new fashions farcically ridiculous and even hateful. Molière, Shakespeare, and even George Bernard Shaw have essayed the same rôle, but none quite so well.

The poet who could conceive the *Frogs* has pondered long and deeply over the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal. He has thought of Athens as it might be were its citizens morally sound and aware of their deepest interests. Paradoxical as it may seem, there is a world of common cause between him and the philosopher Socrates, as Plato pictures him in the *Republic*, though the comic poet in a flourish of satire calls him a sophist and grossly caricatures him in the *Clouds*. Aristophanes sees also the pitiful lack of right opinion and sane action in the democracy that muddles the life of the city and for thirty years has gone crazed over a quite unnecessary war. Now it has got itself into a predicament where only the most heroic of remedies can hold out even the faintest of hope. His duty is clear; sow the seed of this thought in the minds of even the most obtuse. A miracle may be wrought and the city be saved.

The field is prepared and fertilized by the irresistible wit. Not even the most stony ground can fail to respond. Then he sows the seed. The labor of the poet is over; the harvest is beyond his power of control.

Nor was the play unsuccessful, as the theatre manager judges success. Not only was it crowned by the judges and applauded by the audience; but it was repeated. And its fame remains undimmed even after the passage of these centuries. But though noble and slave, magistrate and mechanic, applauded the poet's art and pressed honors on his head, there was no miracle—and for a season Aristophanes wrote no more comedies. Athens had fallen. Its magnificent wall, all its land and sea defenses, were thrown down; and though the city itself and its majestic temples were spared, Athens no longer was Athens, the mistress of the seas and the eyes and brain and heart of Greece. Though her intellectual leadership remained for a season, the barbarian of the north was already making ready. The next chapter in Greek history was to be written by one whose impure dialect the Athenian despised, on whose sceptre sat victory, but whose manners Aristophanes would have been the first to lampoon. Alexander of Macedon was not the glory of Greece that could inspire either a Homer or an Aristophanes.

Nearly forty years after he had begun his career, the poet gave the world his last play, *Plutus*, the God of Wealth. It is interesting, as we follow the development of his mind, that gradually the scope of his comic idea seems to narrow, and the theme to come closer to the every-day life of every-day people. In this respect he is not unlike a famous English comic thinker of to-day. At the beginning, with the rash enthusiasm of youth, he rushes on the stage to reform the world, the state, the political life of the age;

the whole horizon of men and manners is his ambitious program of comic satire and reform. Then comes the crushing disillusionment of failure and repeated failure; men are chronic cases of moral maladjustment, and states are hopeless muddles of inspired incompetency. The convalescence of such is a thing even optimism scarce dares to hope for, and the reformer either turns pessimist and takes the count, or turns buffoon and becomes popular; or what is hardest, tries a gentler and more intimate remedy and retains his gaiety. Aristophanes did the last. And the last genial gesture before his passing is as convincing as his first blare of trumpets when he stormed the stage.

The theme of the play is wealth. Athens had grown a crop of political economists and political theorists who speculated as some are said to do to-day on the distribution and value of wealth. And there were those who ventured to say, in a language we still recognize and shall for ages to come, that the god of wealth is blind and the successful pursuers of the god blind also—to the rights of their less astute fellows. Proposals were being made, by even such admirable thinkers as Plato, who may have got his cue from Socrates, that the whole economic foundation of society was wrong, and that a new deal from a new deck of cards could not make things any worse and would certainly be more just. Athens was still a commercial city and capitalistic; the new ideas were popular, very popular, with a good many.

This is one of the few plays of Aristophanes that has a plot, a story to tell with a climax and conclusion. Generally he contents himself with discovering a situation, as in the *Frogs*, and then he rings the changes as he explores the comic significance of the picture he holds up for our laughter. Chremylus, an honest but resentfully poor burgher of

Athens, and his slave Carion have got hold of Plutus, the god of wealth. This god is not fair to look upon, but is a wretch in rags, blind, and suspicious. His mind is no clearer than his clothes or his sight. His presence, in homes not of his choosing, has been productive of anything but blessings, until now he has come to detest the presence of mortals and yet is condemned to pass his miserable days on earth. But Chremylus who now has him in tow will on no account turn him loose, but proposes instead to restore him his sight so that henceforth he may be more circumspect in his goings and more discreet in those he selects for host. There will be no impiety in the cure, for Zeus has blinded him only because the great god knows himself to be inferior to the god of wealth, so the wily Greek argues. Why, only distribute wealth justly to those who deserve its benefits, impoverish the wicked, and there will be no need of offerings to Zeus, or even of Zeus himself, for what is a god to whom no one offers honors? Wealth can unmake even the father of gods and men.

"Is't possible? O lily-livered thing,  
Scum of celestial spirits, think'st thou Jove,  
His empire and his thunders, worth three obols,  
Hadst thou a moment's space thine eyes again?"

Trembling, the blind one consents to the trial and enters the house of his new-found friend.

But Chremylus' best friend and neighbor, Blepsidemus, has heard of the sudden good fortune. He comes, anxious and hurried, to learn of the secret—and to participate if he can. There must have been something not on the books. Has his honest old friend suddenly turned crook? Has he robbed a temple? Sold his integrity and turned informer and false witness for a price? Has he trafficked unlaw-



fully? But he is willing to hush up the scandal and help his friend to a clean bill of health, and he holds out an up-turned palm while he mingles cupidity with warning and surprise. He is finally convinced of the truth, however, and enters into the plot. They will take Plutus to the Athenian public hospital, the temple of Aesculapius, and there let the god of health restore the sight of the god of wealth—Aesculapius and Plutus, chief nourishers of life's feast.

At this point, comes in Poverty, the filthiest of drabs—and here the poet's imagination is in full vigor—pouring wrath and contempt, warning and imprecation, on the unworthy wretches who are to turn the world upside down and destroy her realm. There is no answer to her cry of impious horror:

"But who will lead the slaver's life, the slaver's forfeit dare,  
When, thanks to thee, his wealth is free, and comes without a care?  
So arm thee fast with spade and plough, to dig, and drudge, and groan,  
With heavier burden far than now.

. . . . .

Nor bed shalt thou repose upon—for bed there will not be,  
Nor rug be wrought in coming times of blest equality:—  
Nor sprinkle oils of rich perfume on happy bridal day;  
Nor broider'd work from cunning loom of thousand hues display;  
And where's the good of golden store, if these be reft away?  
But all ye want 'tis mine to grant—and lavish the supply—  
For mistress-like I set me down the base mechanic by,  
And force for need and lack of bread his daily task to try."

The only thing is to stop her tongue before they are convinced. You can not argue with a fact, you can ignore it at your peril; and they hustle her off the stage.

But the story is already too long. Wealth is cured, and goes in a procession to the home of his benefactor, which is in a twinkling transmuted. Then follows the wise but sparkling wit of the poet—the effects that this sudden eye-opening has upon society. The world has gone mad, a topsy-turvy world where all sorts of grotesqueries and ridiculous buffooneries have suddenly been let loose. It is a sparkle of wit, but the light is used to display the poet's comment on economic revolutions.

The first to appear is a good man who had been ruined by going security for friends. Now he is reinstated in his possessions and he brings his thirteen-year-old cloak and his patched shoes as a reverent offering to the god. His thanks are barely out of his lips before an informer, the basest of mortals who play upon man's credulity, a grafter, a blackmailer, appears, now out of a job. His mouth is filled with angry complaint; the new order has closed down an admirable industry. What will the world come to if honest men like him are deprived of an opportunity? No sooner is he off the stage amid the hoots of the spectators, than an elderly lady minces in with her sad tale. She had a lover, an excellent boy, who had paid her anxious court and to whom she offered her favors and her purse. But now that he has a fortune of his own she can no longer hold him:

"OLD WOMAN. But now—wouldst credit it?—the rogue no more  
Holds the same mind; he's quite another creature.  
For when I sent to him this cheesecake here,  
And those—the other sweetmeats on the platter—  
And hinted, too, he might expect a visit  
Against the afternoon—

CHREMYLUS. What did he? Say.

OLD WOMAN. Did? Sent 'em back—this tart into the bargain—  
On these plain terms—that I should call no longer!"

But the worst of all is yet to be revealed. Hermes, the god, staggers in, weak from starvation. The god of thieves and rogues is he, and now that rogues are abolished, where can he look for his commissary?

"Up till now, among the tapstresses,  
I far'd not ill o' mornings; winecake—honey—  
Dried figs—and all that's meet for Hermes' palate:  
But now, cross-legg'd, I mope for grief and hunger."

Even Zeus and the priest of Zeus, once rolling in wealth, fed fat with the petitions of anxious worshippers, must now turn to new professions. The sudden cure of Wealth has driven even gods to extremities; and the play closes as it began, as all thoughtful satire begins and ends, with laughter that is checked by a compelling idea.

Aristophanes turns, in effect, to social and political and economic theorists that are wasting their days and burning up their nights in the struggle to master the supreme problem of human happiness. But what bewilders them is not the difficulty but the amazing ease. It is a "trick" problem no more severe than the trick weights clowns throw in a circus. Let them stop their gabble, catch Wealth, give him again his eyes, and all will be well. The trick is as easy as the five acts of the comedy and the miracle in the temple of Aesculapius. Even a stupid slave can watch the god at his prophylactic cure. The result is as gratifying as desire could wish. Old gentlemen who indorse notes are reimbursed; every Jack will have his Jill; and elderly ladies with purses must not have a penchant for blooming youth. Grafters and men who live by their wits will have to mend their ways or seek a wicked planet. And above all, there will be no more taxes—or offerings to the gods—for no one will ask for protection or benefits.

All this picture of the golden age is too good to be true; it is good only to be laughed at, as Aristophanes once laughed at the new education in the *Clouds*. Good comedy is never afraid of the clouds, though it refuses to stay there long. Here, moreover, the picture of Poverty and her claim is too realistic. It is a threatening call to wake up and come down to earth.

It is in Aristophanes that we discover the first clear note of the orthodox power of genuine comedy. Whenever men "wax out of proportion . . . whenever they offend sound reason and fair justice, are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually or in bulk—the spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter." So it is described by George Meredith. In Aristophanes we hear the Greek laughter, as in the tragedies we see the moving spectacle of Greek seriousness. But it is not alone at the lesser frailties of reason and justice and conceit that Aristophanes laughs, but at national stupidity in the large. This brilliant satirist can exploit even the most unpleasant and unpopular theme farcically and win the prize from an applauding audience. They poisoned Socrates for telling the truth to their faces; they crowned Aristophanes. No poet since has to men's faces ever dared to speak the truth so boldly—and so recklessly. It is easy to work oneself into a rage over national stupidity and prophet-like cry out against a national disaster. Jeremiah did that more than once in magnificent invective that rings with the boldest of poetic imagery. And for his pains they lowered him into a sightless dungeon. A soap-box orator can do the same thing less poetically on any street corner, and the crowd mills around and moves on or jails him. Aristo-

phanes went about it in the spirit of comedy and gave the world a new form of literature, yet at heart these side-splitting burlesques are as serious as the most deadly prophecies.

The difference between the man of invective and the man who laughs is fundamental. Both hate the evil, but their manner of exploiting their dislikes is curiously antithetical. Invective castigates with a blow, and its weapon for social reform is the gaol or the gallows, and thus sometimes it makes martyrs. The comedy of Aristophanes found no one worthy of the martyr's crown, and its victims are ridiculously unworthy of any fate higher than a good-natured laugh. He hates the fratricidal war, but his anger is disguised by his ridicule of the blatant soldier, Lamachus, and the partizans of war, the grotesquely brutal Acharnians. He fears the moral effect of the new poetry, the new literature (how modern all this sounds!) but he refuses to advocate a censorship in the modern manner; instead he exploits for us the crass ineffectiveness of a caricatured Euripides. The question, whether he is fair or grossly unfair in his portrait of the dead tragedian is now beside the mark, for he was concerned with Athens in the year 405 B.C. and not Europe or America two millenniums and more later. But a modern critic of modern literary tendencies might effectively borrow his technique—if he can discover its power. With a more genial laugh he shows that the theories of his contemporary social thinkers would lead into strange paradoxes which might dismay the theorists. Always behind the fantastic, and giving it a substance and a name, is the sincere and pertinently Greek thought of the poet—practical and ruthlessly curious, as was always the genius of the Greek.

Comedy such as this is always the critic and a vindica-

tion of a people's sanity. And fortunate indeed is a people to whom it is granted to achieve the comic attitude in a day of national crisis. It stands aloof from the popular enthusiasms, critically weighing values and pronouncing a laughing judgment; it refuses to lift its voice in any national slogan, for it knows that more than often these battle cries turn into laments of defeat. Like Homer, Aristophanes keeps his head, refusing to acknowledge the utter sanctity of any cause or any stuffed hero; he will lend his approval only when just cause has been shown. But he is greater than Homer in at least one respect—he has the gift of laughter as well as of clear vision. And this was as it should be—the gift of great comedy can only be known in an age of reflection, when there are those who can be affected by the contagion of laughter.

Aristophanes has left us his own epitaph. In several of his choral odes he turns and addresses the people in his own person, doing with daring skill what George Bernard Shaw repeatedly tried to do in his prefaces. But where the Irishman of to-day is brilliant and paradoxical in his pose, the Greek is morally convincing.

“But He, when the monstrous form he saw, no bribe he took  
and no fear he felt,  
For you he fought, and for you he fights. . . .”

Perhaps never before in the world's history has comedy been more painfully needed than in this our day of enthusiasms and disillusionments. Never before have the momentary enthusiasms of a majority been so fervently exploited as the oracle of the Almighty. Never has the confusion been more evident when insincerity or open hypocrisy has been proclaimed as cosmic truth. Never before has the publicist, the partizan, had quite the opportunity to im-

pose an embarrassed silence through sheer laryngeal vehemence. It is pertinent to ask, not only as did a very great literary critic, "What would Homer or Demosthenes say to our new literature?" but "What would Aristophanes, were he alive, make of our idols of the press and the rostrum?"

Even in his laughter Aristophanes is, like the tragedians, a son of Homer and a true Greek. Like them he is convinced that the only things that count in the long run for human welfare are right knowledge and reason, and his shafts of ridicule are levelled at those who offend by their obliquity of conduct. If only men can learn to measure their lives by the divine faculty of intelligence all their grotesque exaggerations that bring laughter will disappear, as also the tragic situations that move us to tears. But tragedy and comedy have one fundamental difference, a difference so striking that it obscures their common traditions—tragedy strives to make evil intelligible, and the victim of its malicious power even admirable: comedy on the other hand sees only the unintelligible grotesqueness of evil, and laughs as it shrugs its shoulders at its cosmic irrelevancy.



## V. THE TRAGEDY OF EMPIRE

### I. ROME

*"Civis Romanus sum."*

If the Greek had somehow caught and kept the secret of immortal youth, the Roman, his neighbor and rival, was born old. To the bitter end the classical Greek remained an amateur, like Ulysses, tasting life, even in adversity, and finding it good. In his very youth the Roman was a professional, impressed with the serious significance of a mission; and consistently devoted to the main issues, he had no leisure for random exploration or for play. Life to him was a contest in which only the efficient survive, and he early made up his mind who was to be the darling of Providence and the destiny of the world.

To read early Roman history carefully is to follow the story of a chosen people, not destined to be a mockery and a shaking of the head to the nations, as another chosen people, or an example of divine forbearance and ultimate tragedy. The Roman selected his gods with more discretion, shaped them in his own image, and set the world an example of prudence, far-sightedness, and triumphant success. He made a business, not an art, of living; and prospered exceedingly. Leisure to him was degrading, and the work that he gave himself to was the virile business of husbandry, civics, and war,—



"Roman! be thine  
To sway the world with Empire! These shall be  
Thine arts, to govern with the rule of Peace,  
To spare the weak, and subjugate the proud!"

So Virgil puts it in the *Aeneid*, but the lines might have been carved on the first temple of Jupiter that crowned the new Capitoline Hill. The farm, the forum, the battle field—these were the only places where the decent Roman citizen might be found. One of their earliest heroes, Marius Curius, whom the Samnites tried to bribe, was discovered by the embassy in his farm hut preparing his evening meal of turnips. Cincinnatus was taken from the tail of a plow to lead the hasty levies against the Aequians. After six days when the conquest was complete he returned to resume the abandoned furrow. These are the early heroes, men of action and of no preoccupations such as meet us everywhere in Greece. Nor was this early ideal ever completely lost; Cicero was farmer, lawyer, and statesman. His writings like his orations come out of his life. Virgil even when he came "to sing of arms and the man" never quite forgot the plow and the orchards of his countryside.

And all this was as it should be, if Rome was to prosper. The cities of Greece, most of them, were on the sea, the lure of adventure was at their doors, and the urge to go down to the sea in ships was the stirring necessity of life itself. Early Rome was on the broad acres of the Campagna, agriculture was its birthright and the soil was a kindly mother. The restless curiosity that drove the Greek forth gave him his motive for art and literature; the Roman had his wealth at home, if he worked his resources, and he got in exchange his *idée fixe* of husbandry and administration. The Greek conquered the world through art. The Roman conquered the world by sheer

dogged perseverance. Then "Greece led captive her savage conqueror, and taught the arts to rustic Latium." It was a strange meeting in antiquity of this downright virtue of the Roman citizen soldier and this irrepressible enthusiasm of the Greek imagination; but of it was born the tradition that was to be Europe. Rome became the political capital and the seat of empire, Athens remained the intellectual capital and the inspiration of genius.

When Pericles was beautifying Athens and planning the lines of the Parthenon, Rome was busy carving its twelve tables of law. Curious that these dates should almost coincide, but in the fact there is more than an allegory of the two peoples. The early Roman life was equally sober—the Latin word *gravitas* carries in it a world of meaning. Severity—see their sumptuary laws; a trousseau can have only three robes bordered with purple. There must be no hired mourners at a funeral—money was not cheap in those austere days—and there may be only six flute players to precede the corpse. Anything not practical is a sign of degeneracy. Remember the story of the censor Cato, his moral inhibitions, and above all his detestation of the new Greek fashions that were beginning to undermine the Roman health.

But repressive legislation and sumptuary laws could not keep Rome from becoming rich. The city was fortunately situated. Founded, perhaps, by a bandit crew—if we are to credit the story of Romulus and Remus—gaining its first victory over an unpleasantly close neighbor, then by a trick of generous diplomacy turning the defeated enemy into an everlasting friend; and thus slowly by diplomacy or war gradually extending and solidifying its power, it soon became the lord of the region of the Tiber. The commerce between the north and south of Italy went un-

der its walls. The early founders must have known this, for a fortunate site on a highway and a convenient citadel can do much to raise a city's credit and population. Rome grew rich and powerful. Slowly through the centuries it gained control over the whole of Italy, always eager to conquer first and then absorb so that the coming generations could say with pride, whether born in Sicily or Piedmont, "*civis Romanus sum*". All Italy imperceptibly became Rome, and Rome Italy. But Sicily brought Rome into touch with Carthage and Greece, two maritime empires, and the story of their conquest tells of the last crises to be overcome before Rome achieved its full destiny. Gaul, Spain, Britain, Egypt, Asia Minor—these one by one dropped into the lap that now was broad to receive them. The policy of the first conquerors of the Sabines was the policy of Julius Caesar and Pompey—subdue, then assimilate. Saint Paul, a Jew of Tarsus, boasts that he is of no mean city, for it gave him citizenship in Rome. Later, Britain, Spain, and Serbia were to give to Rome its greatest of emperors. There is a battle cry, a challenge, a lift to the heart, in that phrase "*civis Romanus sum*". Its pride has never been rivalled. Socrates, in the *Republic*, finds the ideal of his city in heaven, where "there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order." The Roman pointed to Rome, a house he had built with his own hands and set in order with his own genius. He had no time for cities in heaven.

The Roman religion was equally austere and practical and conservative. Cicero, the enlightened gentleman saturated with the new philosophy and art of Greece, gives a curious sentence that in another people would sound insincere: "The most ancient religious institutions are the

best, because they are nearest to the gods." Yet there is a world of enlightened Roman orthodoxy in these words; and it has a profound significance for the whole spirit and texture of Virgil's great poem.

There is something essentially light-hearted, even gay, in the characters of the Homeric Olympians—they even play, and quarrel when their pranks are discovered. Fancy Virgil's Jupiter or Juno or even Venus in a sportive mood; and yet these are Roman gods after they have undergone a partial conversion to Greek manners. Juno can bribe Aeolus, but she does it in an utterly dignified manner; the young nymph she offers him is to be his bride in lawful wedlock—Hera, her Greek counterpart, would have had no such scruples. The "*saeva ira*", bitter wrath, that afflicts Juno and drives Aeneas "an exile by fate", has in it a wolfish cruelty, but it has none of that unreasoning malice that sent even Athena to earth to betray poor Hector. Juno will smite, and use feminine weapons and guile, but she never loses caste. Hers is a cosmic reluctance to aid in the fulfillment of a cosmic destiny; Jupiter's generous, though impersonal assistance, Juno's frustrated hate, are symbolical of the powers of the universe abetting or delaying a significant human event.

But the earliest religious institutions, those that were indigenous and not borrowed from Greece or elsewhere, even more strikingly differ from the Homeric Greek. The early Roman gods were primarily household or family deities, the spirits of the ancestors perhaps, the Lares and Penates, whose shrine was the hearth and whose especial care was the family. These were the deities that Aeneas carried with him from burning Troy when he fled in his ships. But these were not all, there were a horde of other deities connected with the home and the family estate: the god of

the portal, the god of the boundaries of the farm, the god of fortune. Every act, it would seem, in a man's life, or a woman's, from the cradle to the grave had its tutelary deity, a deity that presided over childbirth, another that guided the child's lips to suck. The spirits that thus surrounded a household were far more numerous than the living members of the family; and all the living and the dead were equally concerned in the family tradition.

For religious purposes the city was only an enlarged family with its appropriate deities to preside over all the little and great civic enterprises. There were the deities of war and peace, the strange two-headed deity that sat at the city gate, looking without and within, ever on guard, Janus. There were mystic abstractions like Fortune, Concord, Plenty whose realm was the economic or social life of the little family community. It is not to be wondered at that Polybius, a Greek, commenting on the Romans, left us this priceless phrase, "The Romans are more religious than the gods." But it was precisely because the early Roman saw a religious significance in every act of his life, and felt himself bound to the past, present, and the future in a spiritual family of which he was an integral part—the little family his *gens*, the larger family the state—that both Cicero and Virgil, looking back at this age of austere devotion, longed for a return of the primitive faith.

And the Empire when it came was only the enlarged city. The new deity was the genius of Rome, now personified in the Emperor, and to whom devotion was paid and incense offered. To us it seems not a trifling blasphemy on the part of the clear-sighted first Emperor Augustus to permit himself to be thus deified. But the Emperor with his power was Rome, not a person; in him centered the majesty of the tradition that had gathered into one orbit all

the manifold destinies of the nation, of tribes of peoples that were now enrolled under the Eagle. He was empire and law, the fountain of power and justice. Such was the first Augustus Caesar of the Julian line to Publius Virgilius Maro of the little Piedmont town of Mantua. What the poet was to the emperor we shall see in the sequel.

Nor should our distance from the event, and the complacency with which we now can read the events of the first century before Christ, allow us to overlook the fact that to Virgil and other thoughtful Romans of the time Octavius Caesar, now Augustus, was a miracle. This is not the place for the story of the century which knew ceaseless civil wars, proscriptions, judicial murders, like that of the philosopher Cicero. More recent history, even the empire of Napoleon, can tell us nothing that can compare with it for bitterness or bloodshed—nothing unless perhaps our own relatively short war of a few years ago. The Roman Empire had grown too unwieldy to be administered successfully by the Senate. Factions arose and dictatorships and civil wars. The bitter rivalry of Marius and Sulla; the conspiracy of Catiline, a popular leader of the proletariat; the wars of Julius Caesar and Pompey; the murder of Caesar by Brutus, Cassius, and a strong senatorial party; the war between Octavius, Antony, and Brutus; then the last war between the victors Octavius and Antony, and the final success of the nephew of the great Julius at Actium in 31 B.C. Was this to be the end of the bloody business? Could a firm and lasting administration be established on the ruins of the rebellions, catastrophes, and party hatreds of a hundred years? These were questions all were asking. Rome was tired, disillusioned, and weary of the drench of blood. What could restore the confidence of the people? Was Octavius an Augustus who could translate

his august will into successful action? So well did he perform the deed that in spite of weak and worthless and vicious emperors—and Rome had more of these than its share—the Roman Empire in its constitution persisted until the attack of the Ottoman Turk in 1453.

A part of the plan of Augustus was Virgil. They had met years before when both were young. Now they met again, Augustus striving to reduce disorder to order, to revive the old Roman civic virtue so sadly decayed by wealth and war, and to inspire the world with the new motive for patriotism. Virgil was the graceful poet of the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, fond of the life of the country, a poet who made friends and no enemies, retiring, but full of an ardor glimpses of which one may catch amid the lighter notes of his early poems. In his *Fourth Eclogue* he had sung the birth of a new world, "the pageant of the centuries born anew,"

*"Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo."*

Whatever the occasion of the poem, the thought of the poet, the eager longing for a new way for an old and worn-out world, is a vivid reminder of the power of poetry over men's imaginations. Again in the *Fourth Georgic* he tells of the life of the bee, dear to the heart of the farmer. But soon the apiary is forgotten and the poet wanders from the bees' industry and order and reads a lesson to contemporary Rome.

"Of all creatures they alone possess their children in common, dwell in a city where each house is the house of all, and live their days under the majesty of law: alone they acknowledge a country, and an abiding home, and in summer, mindful of the winter to come, have recourse to toil and store their gains for the common good."

At its conclusion the poet turns to the world conqueror.

"Thus have I striven to sing of the care of fields, of kine, and of trees, while great Caesar fulmines by the deeps of Euphrates, assigning, in victorious march, laws to the willing nations, and assaying on earth the path to Heaven!"

Now Augustus summons the poet to write the poem of Rome and Roman destiny. His answer was the *Aeneid*. Augustus reduced the Roman world to order; Virgil made it articulate in poetry; and in the *Aeneid* the words "*civis Romanus sum*" acquired a new and utterly unexpected significance.

## II. VIRGIL'S AENEID

"*Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.*" VIRGIL.

The less we know about our ancestors the better is it for our family pride. The same must also be true of peoples; and our minute antiquarians delving into the past with pick and yardstick are doing romance a doubtful service. A hero has a way of turning into a hopeless pirate, and a great war into a village squabble. But it is an incurable human trait to touch up the past with the colors of fancy, and to endow humble beginnings with the paraphernalia of august romance. The wandering Sheikh Abraham became for the Hebrew the friend and companion of Jehovah; and David and Saul, heroes such as the world of the commonplace will look for in vain. The Greek heroes Achilles, Ulysses, Theseus, Bellerophon, become symbols of Greek aspiration, divine almost in the beauty and accomplishment of their lives and superhuman in their tragedies. The same incorrigible habit of dressing up the past made the Roman trace his origins to the cosmic catastrophe of the



Trojan war. For to the people of the eastern Mediterranean this war became as significant as an astronomical date. Virgil when he tries in the *Aeneid* to tell of the founding of Rome goes back to it unerringly, and with it mixes folklore, anthropological research, myth, fable, and the constitution of the Roman Empire.

The hero Aeneas is a Trojan prince, the son of old Anchises who in his youth had known the favor of Venus. Homer knew him and refers to his historical importance, but little dreamed that he was to become the genius and founder of a city yet in the seeds of time. Superficially, the poem follows the manner of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The poet goes *in medias res*. The little fleet of boats with Aeneas in command, fleeing from Troy and now in the seventh year of their wanderings, are spied by Juno as they coast Sicily on their way to Italy and the site of their new home. Things are going entirely too well with them for this jealous goddess who yet smarts with indignation against every reminiscence of Troy and the insulting Paris. She bribes Aeolus to let loose all the winds of heaven at once, and a storm such as never was on land or sea sweeps the frail armada to the African coast.

One cannot escape one's destiny, and there in a little city newly founded was another refugee, Dido, prepared by the imagination of romance, to receive the great refugee Aeneas. Rome and its deadly rival Carthage—the city that lay fairly across the Roman ambition to sway the world, the city that later was to take all Rome's power to destroy—were thus brought together in their infancy, and for a moment Fate seemed propitious. Dido, the Carthaginian, receives Aeneas, the future Roman, with generous hospitality, beautiful in its disarming sincerity. He is regally entertained, and at the close of an ambassadorial banquet

relates his adventures to ears already tuned to his lightest word.

He tells of the last stratagem of the wily Ulysses, the wooden horse, the traitor Sinon, the night of fire and slaughter, the death of Priam, the raging blood-lust of the adulterous Helen—it is significant how Virgil, the Roman, abhors her character—the little band that gathered for a last stand, the escape, the loss of his wife Creusa in the confusion. Mark this last, Ulysses in his wanderings without scruple accepts the informal hospitality of Circe or Calypso; but the “pious” Aeneas must bring to Dido a clean page on which to write her tragedy. Creusa must die a sacrifice to Roman *gravitas*. If Aeneas must fall in love, his grief at parting with Dido must have no further complicating motives. Finally the little band escapes, Aeneas carrying Anchises, the first generation, and leading the third, the little boy Ascanius Iulus, and clinging to the sacred relics, the Lares and Penates, the household gods, rescues the essence of the tradition that shall be Rome. All this is a superb bit of dramatic recitation. The scenes are as realistic as one could wish. Aeneas is a raconteur almost as good as Ulysses.

He next turns to the story of the wanderings and the attempts, now here, now there, to found a city, and the chase from pillar to post, the adventures of a professional exile. But the world in the first century is a much smaller one and better charted than the world of Homer. If Homer can lie delightfully about Laestrygonians and Cyclops, and can go even to Hades and carry conviction, Aeneas must be circumspect and observe the rigid requirements of geography and anthropology. So where he fails in the marvelous he makes up in the pathetic. There is nothing much finer in his poetry than the picture of Andro-

and fall of Troy. Why travel when the allurements of home are so near? They decide to read their men a lesson, and set off to burn the ships. If the men want adventure, there are forests to fell and houses to build, and hearths to be consecrated. But alas for the futility of woman's longings and efforts at direct action.

The fleet journeys on to the magnificent Bay of Naples, and there we have the promise to which all past events have been leading—a vision of the splendor of Eternal Rome. To get it the hero must with the Sibyl make the journey to the lower world. There the spirit of his father reveals to him the promise of the future, and before his rapt eyes passes in panorama the pageant of the coming centuries and their heroic virtues, powers, and principalities. Yet before the magnificence, shrinking from Aeneas' presence, flits the shade of her who once was Dido. Did the heart of the hero rise to the mighty symphony of Empire? Could he forget that its first movement crushed the heart of a woman and queen? In the midst of the *te Deum* there is room for a catch of pain for the victims of the conquest.

Tragedy of Empire, the remainder of the story is full of it—the wars Aeneas must wage, the disappointments that follow disaster, the hearts that must be broken, the magnificent manhood that must be sacrificed, the boys and girls that must give up their lives, Camilla, Pallas, Nisus, Euryalus,—there is all this and more in these books that are often junked together, labelled a pale imitation of the *Iliad*, and read only by those who must pass university courses in Virgil. The poem was to have closed with the union of Aeneas and the first eligible princess of the new land. The wedding is prepared and the guests are ready, but the bridegroom never appears. Aeneas kills his rival,

noble Turnus, whose only fault is that he was not born a Trojan and resented an invader, favorite of Heaven though the invader was. The poem closes as his heroic spirit flees his stricken body, and Aeneas stands dismayed before the spectre of victory. He is in no frame of mind for a wedding—nor is the reader.

Such is the poem that was for many centuries, and in some unconfessed places is yet, held up as the mirror of all noble poetry. It is unfair both to Homer and to Virgil to compare it with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is something so utterly new, both in manner and theme, that the Greek imagination could not have compassed it; for it is of the genius of Rome, and yet expresses for all time the tragedy of the Imperial City.

The Roman was born old; but the world when Virgil lived had likewise grown old and disillusioned. Wars and the capture of distant lands, and the spectacle of captive princes in chains at the heels of conquerors' chariots, had lost some of their lustre in these later days. What shall it profit a nation, as well as a man, if it gain the whole world, and leave in jeopardy its own soul? The soul of Rome was not content: material greatness, the tribute from the ends of the earth, the splendor of the new buildings, the glory of peace and perfect order, all these left the imagination cold. All of this sense of the vanity of achievement, in spite of the poet's wish perhaps, in spite of what was to be the main theme of the poem certainly, has crept into the poem, and made it not the celebration of the Roman genius but the symbol of the paradox of human greatness. There is little to choose between the tears of Achilles mingling with those of the aged Priam as each thinks of the beloved slain, and the bitter bewilderment of Aeneas as in the dying words of Turnus he counts the price of empire.

"But he, with eyes and pleading hand outstretched,  
 Spake humbly: 'I deserved it, nor repine.  
 Use thou thy chance. If thee a father's pain  
 Can touch, I pray, (such was thy sire to thee,  
 Anchises,) pity Daunus in his age.  
 Me or my life-lorn corse restore to mine.  
 Thou hast prevailed, and me Ausonia sees  
 Stretch conquered palms. Lavinia's hand is thine.  
 No further press thine hate.' "

The poem is to be the celebration of the idea of Rome, and the story of its proud beginnings. For it is not a city like one of the Gentiles, whose fortune is due to chance and whose end is as irrelevant as its beginnings. Rome is the favored city—its ancestor was Troy in whose hand had been the sceptre of the East. A malignant fate had undone Troy; but its people—a sacred remnant—and its private gods were divinely guided to a new region in the unknown West, where there should be new beginnings, a new fate, and slowly the empire of both West and East.

"To them I assign no limit, no date of empire: my grant to them is dominion without end."

It shall be a city where private claims shall be as nothing against the claims of country and tradition. Its founder, Aeneas, must sink his own will in that of the new epoch. What is love or rest or any private motive in the perspective of the larger claims of family and race?

"Not such his mother promised him to us,  
 And not for this twice saved him from the Greek;  
 But o'er the Imperial Mother's warrior sons,  
 O'er Italy to reign, from Teucer's blood  
 Prolong the line, and bind the world by law.  
 If no such glory fires him, if no toil  
 For his own fame he takes, yet doth he grudge  
 His son Ascanius the high towers of Rome?"

The reward of this spirit of self-sacrifice shall be empire, but not such empire as the nations had known in the ages of darkness and tyranny. The world had known the Babylonian and the Persian lust of conquest and empire that began and ended with the will of the soldier emperor. Selfish rule and the bowed heads of tributary princes, and the glory of far-flung satraps and treasuries bursting with tribute, these were the things that to lesser breeds had brought nothing but sinful pride and servile dismay, good neither for victor nor vanquished. The pride of Nineveh and Tyre had taught its princes nothing but arrogance, and its victims nothing but hate and vengeance. The story of Rome must be written with new characters, inspired by a new conscience, and its victims must read in its triumph a sure lesson for themselves, and a warning against pride and rebellion.

The moral responsibility of empire, Virgil's poem is as full of it as the speeches of liberal thinkers from Burke to President Wilson. Empire to justify itself before the world must come offering gifts in both hands, and base its claim to rule on justice and magnanimity. To the Roman who could with Augustus send his eye over the whole world and see under Roman administration the new order of justice and temperance, these words of Anchises as he reveals to his son the march of the centuries, must have been an exaltation of spirit:

"Some with more grace may mould the breathing brass,  
And draw from stone, I trow, the living form,  
Plead causes better, map the heavenly paths,  
And tell the rising stars. Roman! be thine  
To sway the world with Empire! These shall be  
Thine arts, to govern with the rule of Peace,  
To spare the weak, and subjugate the proud!"

The glory, the responsibility, the moral grandeur, of wise conquest has never been more adequately portrayed.

It was, also a divinely willed conquest, achieved by patient and self-less labor, by a people inspired by a lofty piety, a diligent forgetfulness of self, and a willingness to undertake the most savage of tasks *pro bono publico*. Such are the ideals, as Virgil paints them, of the little crew of Trojans as they face the odds of a hostile universe, and unflinchingly look in the face the deadliest of danger. Aeneas' wanderings are different in spirit from those of Ulysses. Here we have moral courage lighted by an ideal that is far from selfish or personal. Ulysses longed for home and peace after his labors. Aeneas may not live to see his home, and peace he shall never attain; his life is dedicated to something that only a superior revelation could enable him to understand. Such is the glory of Rome—something beyond the personal fate of Aeneas or Augustus, something historical, corporate, a tradition of generous empire.

All this a lesser poet than Virgil, in the days of Augustus, might have attained. Lucan could catch the note in his poem, the *Pharsalia*; but Virgil was a great poet, and his vision pierced the veil of glory that draped the shrine of Rome's destiny, and saw behind it tragedy. In his youthful *Eclogue* he had sung an age of gold that sits with strange comfort beside the vision of the Second Isaiah in the Bible.

"The last age, heralded in Cymaeon song, is come, and the great march of the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns; now Saturn is king again, and a new and better race descends from on high. Only do thou, pure Lucina, deign to smile on the nascent babe, by whose grace our iron breed shall at last cease, and the age of gold dawn on all the world. Now thy Apollo reigns!"

"On thee, child, at every turn the unlaboured earth shall shower her gifts. The ivy-tendrils shall wanton with the fox-glove, and the bean with the laughing briar. The goats, uncalled, shall bring home their udders big with milk, and the cattle shall not fear the great lion. Thy cradle, even, shall blossom with smiling flowers: the serpent shall perish and the herb that hides its poison be no more, and Assyrian spices shall spring in every field."

This was to be a reign of peace and love, a regime that poets like Shelley are to glimpse again in a troubled age many centuries later. But the *orbis Romanorum* was not to be exactly this unmixed blessing. Virgil, the later student of history and the associate of princes, learned better. Peace and justice are beautiful ideals, seen from a poetic distance; but their establishment may mean tragedy.

Thus the poem becomes something far more than the celebration of the genius of Rome; and mingled with the incense and the strains of the *te Deum* sung by a victorious host, there are felt the tears of the lesser folk whose agony so seldom becomes articulate in great literature. "*Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.*" Homer could sing the song of disillusionment of victory. Achilles weeping that his revenge, complete to the last detail, brings to him nothing but a sense of the emptiness now of his life,—this is cold comfort to hold forth as reward for a life of action and glory. But Virgil weeps the fate of the victims of conquest, the cannon fodder of battle, the privates and non-commissioned officers as well as the commanders of armies and the heroines of romance, whose tragedies were the triumph of Rome's destiny. The glory, too, of self-realization and self-respect in which the Homeric hero finds a recompense for a life short but full of action, means nothing to Virgil, for he can never forget that the victor sets his foot on the neck of his victim.



Tragedies of conquest. The thought has become familiar to us in these later years—the emptiness of national glory when it is built on the graves of its victims. Again and again the cry of protest goes up from the heart of the poet. Dido—sacrificed to the sense of duty, to a tradition she could not understand and which on its return was again to lay waste her city—crying out from a heart of bitterness. Has grief ever more vividly throbbed in great poetry?

“Then, awed by Doom, unhappy Dido prays  
For death, and wearies of the vaulted sky.  
And more befell to urge her from the light:  
For while on incensed shrines she laid her gifts,  
The holy nymph turned black before her eyes,  
O horrible! the wine was changed to blood!  
From all, from Anna’s self that sight she hid.  
And in the Palace stood a marble shrine,  
Sacred to her dead lord, with snow-white wool  
Lovingly wreathed, and crowned with festal green.  
Thence, when the world was veiled in gloomy night,  
Voices were heard, her husband seemed to call,  
And on the roof, with wailing long drawn out,  
A solitary owl would chant her dirge.  
And many a word of many a prophet old  
Scared her with boding fears. In fevered dreams  
Aeneas goads her on; and still she seems  
Forsaken, walking one long road alone,  
And looking for her kin in lands forlorn.”

Turnus, the gallant hero, fighting for his home and fireside against a fated invader. To the end utterly chivalrous, sensing his destiny, but resolved never to yield.

“Not me thy fiery words  
Daunt. The Gods daunt me, and the hate of Jove.”

And his pathetic words to his nymph sister, who with a love beyond mortal strives to counsel and aid:

"Now, Sister, now Fate triumphs. Stay no more.  
 Where God, where Fortune calls us, let us go.  
 I vow to meet Aeneas, and to bear  
 What sharpness is in death. Thou shalt not see me  
 Longer in shame! This fury let me wreak  
 Before the end!"

These are the things that live longest in one's memory of the poem. No *pax Romana* can be a compensation for such private grief.

But this is to look at Empire in a way that is far from orthodox. Kipling the modern, who has sung the responsibility and also the tragedy of conquest, thinks of other deaths and other heartbreaks.

"We have fed the seas for a thousand years  
 And she calls to us yet unfed.

. . . . .

If blood be the price of admiralty  
 Lord God we have paid in full."

For the blood and the price of admiralty that stirs the British poet is that of the unknown British patriot, who has lost himself that his country might be proud. But to Virgil it is not the Roman dead that are the *lacrimae rerum*, and their fate does not touch the strings of his lyre. To them has come the vision of their own triumphant cause. It is the others, those who with the best motives in the world have opposed the cause, those whom most poets would reckon as enemies, worth only a generous rebuke if not hatred, whose fate touches the heart of the poet.

Of all pathetic figures in Virgil those of youth are the most moving. Virgil loves youth, for it is the age of generous sentiment and spontaneous. Before the evil days

come, when noble aspirations and impulses are discovered to be incompatible with reality, when disillusionment has not dried the sap of ideals, the poet loves to lay bare the exquisite charm of budding youth. Young Nisus and Euryalus, two Trojan boys, on guard at the gate when the camp was surrounded by the enemy and their general, Aeneas, was away on an expedition for allies—they will do one noble deed, even if death be the reward. They will set forth alone in the night to carry the word to their leader. Listen to their counsel:

“Me dost thou ban from sharing deeds so high?  
And shall I send thee to such straits alone?

. . . . .

A soul is here that scorns the light, and deems  
Well-bought with life that glory thou dost aim!”

But this is no story where boyish daring is successful against a vigilant enemy. The boys are caught and killed.

“O happy pair! if aught my strains avail,  
Time shall not steal your memory, while Troy’s House  
Shall stand on Capitol’s eternal Rock,  
And Rome’s high Father own imperial sway!”

The exquisite female warrior Camilla—not an Amazon, but a soft girl, redoubtable in war but gentle and wholly charming. She, too, must be slain, by a Trojan in an infamous manner; and the poet does not spare his condemnation.

“As, when he slays a shepherd or an ox,  
The wolf at once in mountain heights untracked  
Buries himself, ere vengeance can pursue,  
Knowing his boldness, and his cowering tail  
Smooth to his belly draws, and seeks the woods:

So out of sight slunk Arruns in dismay,  
And in thick battle plunged, content to fly."

War does not spare the best and most beautiful; but it also brings out the most exquisite poetry of tragedy.

Against these is the character of Aeneas—a hero hopelessly middle-aged, unromantic, almost impersonal. He is a statesman who would be at his best about the council board where words are counters invented to obscure thought. He would be at home in front of a fireplace, in dressing gown and slippers, dozing after his pipe is out and the newspaper's financial columns digested. His chiefest adventure would be to ride to his palatial office in a heated limousine behind a glorified flunkey. But Virgil makes of him an epic hero; and strange as is the paradox, in this strangely out-of-place figure, forced to emulate Ulysses, when his heart is not in the adventure, the poet has created a masterpiece. When he should at worst be on the golf course, beating his way out of a bunker, Aeneas is avoiding the hazard of a Cyclops; when he would shine at an ambassador's tea, he is making a shameless pastoral match with Dido. He is always out of place, and yet for the poem always in the center of the picture—an impossible hero, dignified middle-age ever forced to the conduct of buoyant and spontaneous youth. Yet Aeneas is the poet's chiefest triumph. For this epic hero in himself is the symbol, more than his victims, of the tragedy of empire.

Aeneas is the victim—not the victor—of his own epic conquest. In the Homeric epic the hero is glorified, consecrated, by his actions—at the lowest he has the personal conviction of having spontaneously acquitted himself like a man. In the Virgilian the hero becomes willy-nilly an instrument of Providence; and every spontaneous act

brings its quick retribution. He is a lonely spirit with no leisure, and finally no desire for play. The Greek loved adventure, took his life in his hands and gambled with fate, and gladly paid his gambling debts even with his life. The Roman followed the main issue, answering the inner or outer call of irrevocable duty; the course before him always lay plain with every detour marked and dangers catalogued in the blue-book of oracles. How could he gamble when his life was a Providential trust fund?

Twice, perhaps thrice, did Aeneas falter. On the night of leaving Troy he would have followed his heart's longing and perished with his friends and his city. But no, he must withdraw, the higher voice has spoken. He must lose his wife, his friends are all slain, but he with a chosen band is set apart for a more terrifying fate. Even before the *Aeneid* begins Aeneas has seen the utmost of evil and gazed at the most malignant aspect of Death. What new inspiration shall he find for living? He is dry-eyed and disillusioned even before he begins his career. Then from the ashes of his life, on the urge of the kindred soul of Dido, springs a flame that for a moment promises one glad spontaneous payment of a dead life's arrears. But the flame must be quenched; his duty is elsewhere, and what has that thing—the last clinging affection of middle-age that for a moment has caught a fresh motive for living—what has love to do in a life wholly devoted as is his to Rome? This is tragedy—a tragedy deeper, I suspect, than that of Dido—the tragedy of a man late in life who must cast away his last and most generous motive. The poet feels it:

“As when the Alpine winds together strive  
Some many-wintered oak with veering blasts  
To uproot. It creaks, and from the storm-lashed trunk  
Leaves strew the ground; yet to the rock it clings,

And high as it uplifts to heaven its head,  
 So deep to Tartarus its roots extend.  
 Thus, buffeted by veering voices, stands  
 Aeneas; and his mighty heart is wrung.  
 Firm stands his will; and idly tears roll down."

Even in the lower world the hero pursues her with his tears, and in this last cry he abandons the motive man has ever found most precious.

" 'Unhappy Dido! Ah! 'twas truly told  
 That thou wert dead, and sought the end with steel!  
 Was I the cause? O, by the stars I swear,  
 By Heaven, and all the sanctities of Hell!  
 Unwillingly, O Queen, I left thy shores!  
 But God's own word, which through this shadowy place  
 Now drives me, and these festering fields of Night,  
 Imperious thrust me forth; nor could I deem  
 My going thence would bring thee so much woe.  
 Stay! Turn not from my gaze! O, who is this  
 Thou shunnest? 'Tis my last permitted word!

. . . . .

But still Aeneas, stricken by her woes,  
 Pursued her far with pity and with tears."

Did Virgil when he set about to write the grandeur that was Rome intend this paradox? Or rather like the fisherman in the Arabian Nights, did he not stand aghast at the spectre of tragedy his own cast has dragged from the depths? Here is a poem that is in praise of a spirit in revolt, of unrealized longings, of love that must be suppressed even before it has displayed its beauty. Have we not in it a thing that narrowly escapes becoming the greatest imaginative work of antiquity?

For Aeneas the Trojan read Augustus the Roman emperor. The parallel is most striking. A youth eighteen

he must take up the labor that fell from the murdered hand of his adopted father, Julius Caesar. For the period that a young man gives to youth and its irresponsibilities, Octavius must give to stern war and intrigue. He must war down or wear down opposition, Cassius, Brutus, then Mark Antony, these obstacles to the *imperium Romanum* must one by one be swept aside or crushed. He can have no friends, for an emperor may have only counsellors. The Roman Emperor is a tradition as impersonal as its laws and institutions; what place is there in his life for play or spontaneous joy!

But there are other motives than these that drive the iron into the poet's soul and make of his poem the chant of unrealized longings. In his age appeared full blown the contrast between philosophy and science and religion, a paradox that has affected deeply again the poetry of our own time. On the one hand there is the world of science and philosophy cold and orderly, pervaded by law, but leaving no room for human aspiration and comfort. Virgil accepts this new philosophy—"totamque infusa per artus mens agitat molem". Reason pervades the universe, as utterly as Roman law pervaded human society. How shall a poet, in love with life, and sensing human values and their ineffable worth, find room in this vast orderly and cold world for the warmth of human life?

Nor could he find aid in religion. The gods had become mere symbols. Zeus is only the spirit, or mind, of the universe, impervious to the sufferings and fates of mortals. Prayer to them is a futile gesture. "Cease to hope by prayer to sway the will of Fate." Man must obey the dictates of Providence and practice justice—in this is the whole duty of man comprised. In this arid thought of a comfortless humanity, will arise for the poet the question of questions

—do gods exist? Are not instead our own desires and strivings the gods that whisper in vain to our deluded ears? Seeking an answer to human suffering, he can discover nothing but a pitiless universe of law, the reign of science, and as inflexible an idea of empire, cold comfort for a poet so touched by the significance of the human lot as Virgil.

The story goes—and is no doubt true—that when he died, with the *Aeneid* yet unrevised and unpolished, he left instructions that it be destroyed. But could Virgil ever have completed it? Is not the poem as he lived it a paradox as unresolvable as the fate of humanity itself? But also because of this eternal dissatisfaction and the yearning of the poet's heart, is it not also one of the greatest poems the world has yet known? He cannot wholeheartedly deny the value of the suffering individual; as wholeheartedly he cannot deny Rome and Empire. Between these two poles his compass oscillates forever. He picks out a warrior for a hero, but creates an institution as inflexible as Roman law, and writes in his success his tragedy. He sets out to picture the eternal feminine as an irrelevant episode in the march of Roman destiny, and he has added to the world of literature the heroine of tragic romance. He would chide her for her sin,—I am paraphrasing Professor Garrod—and he “pursued her far with pity and with tears”. He tries a picture of a Roman enemy and a villain, and he draws the portrait of a hero. And the tradition which he would discover for the city became in time the unworldly inspiration of the church.

The Middle Ages saw in Virgil an anticipation of Christianity. There is more than a myth in this judgment. He lived in a tired world seeking comfort in a new humanity and a new tradition. He created a new humanity and a new tradition founded upon ideals of justice and self-



sacrifice. His Aeneas stands midway between the ideal of Pope and Caesar. But at the same time there are tears for the downtrodden and the sinful, for those whose lot had not been imperial, and in this great pity is writ large also the sweetest chapter of the gospel of Jesus. Virgil is the most modern of all ancient poets.



## VI. THE BANKRUPTCY OF PAGANISM

### I. SOCRATES

“Know thyself.” SOCRATES.

It is curious and even paradoxical to link Socrates, the greatest of the Pagans, with the bankruptcy of paganism. It will be sheer light-mindedness to use the term pagan as do certain easy and obvious writers and readers to-day. Homer, Sophocles, and Phidias, who never knew the word, would stand ashamed before the incense the “pagans” to-day are offering to their new and strange god. There was a god called Priapus whom the later Greek and some others cultivated, a god borrowed from another people, and who would have felt strangely out of place among Homer’s Olympians, and his later service would have provoked in the bard only a smile of contempt. Greek tragedy has a code of morals as rigid as any; so has Greek comedy, though it is far more free-spoken; and Greek philosophy, especially in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, was early made orthodox by the Fathers of the Christian church. If we speak justly of paganism, we must do it with a difference.

There are many varieties of paganism in addition to the one we are now concerned with; and if one feels an inner compulsion to use the word, let him at least be sufficiently honest to describe the variety that best suits his peculiar

mental prejudice. I here am thinking of its finest flower in the philosophy of life of two amazing personalities separated by an interval of six hundred years; one the son of a poor artist and a journeyman artist in stone himself, but a professional in the much more difficult art of attaining moral perfection; the other an emperor, adopted to the purple in a time of tense anxiety in the Roman world, a soldier and administrator and—a man. The one left not a line of his own writing, but inspired the richest poems in prose the world has known. The other left us only his intimate diary, a thing composed for his own perusal in his odd moments of leisure. The friend of all men, Socrates; and the lonely spirit, humble and proud, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Both were rulers of cities not made by the hand of man, and the cities they built for their souls only the choicest spirits may enter. This is the paganism of which I would speak, flowers that sprang from the soil of Greece, which were too strange for the passing hand to pluck, and were the frozen assets that Greek paganism could not in its dire need convert into currency, assets that remained unliquidated for over a millennium.

In Greek poetry, the great imaginative figures fill us with admiration; in Greek philosophy the personalities of the many-sided men who thought and translated their thought into action leave us no less astonished. Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Epicurus, Pythagoras, Socrates—the list is a long one, but before the charm and the many-sidedness of Socrates the rest fade into the background. So powerful was his hold on his friends that Plato, the gifted youth and aspiring poet, gave his life to undertake an adequate memorial to his master. In the *Dialogues* he has left us we are never certain where Socrates leaves off and Plato begins, so perfectly does the art of the dramatic philosoph-

ical biographer play over the features of this remarkable man. Plato, the dramatist that was not to be, created a genre in literature that has been the despair of his successors, the dramatic dialogue and prose novel. And in the best and most significant there is in the foreground always the compelling personality of Socrates—as Plato came to know him—a portrait, complete and unique, of the man, who, more than any other save one, was to give direction to the current of European thought. We can no more escape this garrulous inquirer into every man's business to-day than could his Athenian fellow citizens who finally in a fit of "fundamentalist" frenzy put him to death.

But the martyrdom of Socrates was no accident—it was logical in the nature of things and human. He himself, as we can now look back on him, was no accident. The world had grown suddenly older, getting away from its youthful optimism, and insisting on taking life a bit more thoughtfully. Both Euripides and Aristophanes insist on seeing human nature as it is, shorn of the aid of romance and illusion. The glamor somehow had faded even as the columns of the Parthenon—that glamor in architecture—were being moved into place. The great masterpieces of statuary—the Pallas Athene and Zeus, or the work of Praxiteles, that adorned the Acropolis, and have fired the imagination of artists but have never been equalled—were carved as also chip by chip the old ancestral faith lost something of its vital hold on the imagination of poets and philosophers. A nation pays a price at coming of age—as does an individual—and the heaviest is the loss of unquestioning faith.

In its place there came the new science, the close objective study of nature, and especially of human nature, the most important of all sciences. Their apparatus for the study

of physical nature was crude, and some of their results as we consider them today ludicrously inadequate, but one must also remember that it took Europe nearly twenty centuries to begin again where the Greeks left off. But their results in the study of man and his institutions is as valuable to-day as when Plato and Aristotle laid aside the pen. Out of this consuming interest in man and his place in nature and society, the thing that the poets likewise were greatly concerned with, came Socrates.<sup>1</sup>

It is curious—is it not?—how Socrates belongs to all ages, though he is most intimately Greek. Few, if any, of his fellow-citizens could dream that in this gossiping man, who somehow after the most devious of conversation, and after the most ingratiating or irritating display of irony, who talked of cookshops, training of horses, the trade of musicians and actors, the immortality of the soul, and the true nature of justice and beauty—few realized that in him they had the most cosmopolitan and perpetually rejuvenated individual the world has ever known. He died a Greek at Athens in 399 B.C., when over seventy. But he lived again in Rome. To the early church Fathers he was the great pagan pre-Christian. Dante in the Middle Ages stops in his supernal journey through the region of the pagan notables to gaze upon him and Plato. Rousseau joins him with Jesus as humanity's greatest heritage. To-day there are an even greater number who would speak admiringly in his name. Yet this man left no system of philosophy—such systems are often only a dubious heritage—he wrote not a line to be left for posterity, so far

<sup>1</sup> I hope it will be abundantly clear that I am not interested here in the philosophy of Plato or Socrates—I mean their metaphysical theory and that thing generally called Platonic idealism. These high-flown speculations are appropriate, doubtless, in a history of philosophy or a course in metaphysics. Enough has been written about them and to spare. But here—

as we know. In their place, he left the abundant portrait of his personality, something unique, complete, satisfying; something richer even and more intimate than the gift of poet or artist—the supreme gift of Greek civilization to the world.

Yet there are precious few details of his life given us—alas for the microscopic biographers who would uncover every detail of a great man's life, hoping in this cloud of chaff to discover the jewel of genius. He was a sculptor of some ability—one wonders how much—I suspect considerable. But early he was caught by the promise of philosophy to unravel a clue to the insistent problem of how to live the good life. So his business suffered while he paraded the streets and market place of Athens—the club of that day—in search for wisdom, and willing to let others know of his success and failure.

“For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, I am a mischievous person.”

Cicero speaks of him as bringing philosophy down from the skies to live with men. The skies Cicero is thinking of are those of the astronomer. For Socrates cared little for speculations about astronomy or physics; his concern was the world of men; but in this inquiry his vision sweeps the whole heaven of human struggle and aspiration.

But he was no abstract speculator, shut into his closet and spying on life from the safety of his window. He lived the life of a man in a world of men. His *Apology* is his

vindication of this life of action and search. That he might be free at all times he refused to take part in public life, preferring the self-imposed task of journeyman-philosopher. Yet twice was he called upon to fulfill a political duty, and on both occasions in spite of personal danger, he acted as a man, refusing at his peril to allow an act of manifest injustice. He served as a soldier. Let the man of the world and popular favorite Alcibiades tell the story in his own way, as in the *Banquet*.

"All this happened before he and I went on the expedition to Potidaea; there we messed together, and I had the opportunity of observing his extraordinary power of sustaining fatigue. . . . Yet at a festival he was the only person who had any real powers of enjoyment; though not willing to drink, he could if compelled beat us all at that,—wonderful to relate! no human being had ever seen Socrates drunk; and his powers, if I am not mistaken, will be tested before long. His fortitude in enduring cold was also surprising. There was a severe frost, for the winter in that region is really tremendous, and everybody else either remained indoors, or if they went out had on an amazing quantity of clothes, and were well shod, and had their feet swathed in felt and fleeces; in the midst of this, Socrates with his bare feet on the ice and in his ordinary dress marched better than the other soldiers who had shoes, and they looked daggers at him because he seemed to despise them.

" . . . I will also tell, if you please—and indeed I am bound to tell—of his courage in battle; for who but he saved my life? Now this was the engagement in which I received the prize of valour: for I was wounded and he would not leave me, but he rescued me and my arms; and he ought to have received the prize of valour which the generals wanted to confer on me partly on account of my rank, and I told them so (this, again, Socrates will not impeach or deny), but he was more eager than the generals that I and not he should have the prize. There was another occasion on which his behavior was very remarkable—in the flight of the army after the battle of Delium, where he served among the heavy-armed,—I had a better opportunity of seeing him than at Potidaea, for I was myself on horseback, and therefore comparatively out of danger. He and Laches were retreating, for the troops were in flight, and I met them and told

them not to be discouraged, and promised to remain with them; and there you might see him, Aristophanes, as you describe, just as he is in the streets of Athens, stalking like a pelican, and rolling his eyes, calmly contemplating enemies as well as friends, and making very intelligible to anybody, even from a distance, that whoever attacked him would be apt to meet with a stout resistance; and in this way he and his companion escaped—for this is the sort of man who is never touched in war; those only are pursued who are running away headlong.”

This man loves the city more than the country, and naturally, for only among men can he discover the thing he searches after. Yet he too can acknowledge the charm of nature, though he will never allow it to seduce his imagination.

“How delightful is the breeze:—so very sweet; and there is a sound in the air shrill and summerlike which makes answer to the charm of the cicadae. But the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head. My dear Phaedrus, you have been an admirable guide.”

A jesting—yet true—picture of him is given by his admirer Alcibiades, again in the *Banquet*:

“And now, my boys, I shall praise Socrates in a figure which will appear to him to be a caricature, and yet I speak, not to make fun of him, but only for the truth’s sake. I say, that he is exactly like the busts of Silenus, which are set up in the statuaries’ shops, holding pipes and flutes in their mouths; and they are made to open in the middle, and have images of gods inside them. I say also that he is like Marsyas the satyr. You yourself will not deny, Socrates, that your face is like that of a satyr. Aye, and there is a resemblance in other points too. For example, you are a bully, as I can prove by witnesses, if you will not confess. And are you not a flute-player? That you are, and a performer far more wonderful than Marsyas.

“ . . . I have heard Pericles and other great orators, and I thought that they spoke well, but I never had any similar feeling; my soul was not stirred by them, nor was I angry at the thought of my own slavish state. But this Marsyas has often brought me to such a pass, that I have felt as if



I could hardly endure the life which I am leading (this, Socrates, you will admit); and I am conscious that if I did not shut my eyes against him, and fly as from the voice of the siren, my fate would be like that of others,—he would transfix me, and I should grow old sitting at his feet.”

He touches life at every point. He will not philosophically abstain from the joys of the banquet, though he can remain philosophically sober.

“And first of all Aristophanes dropped off, then, when the day was already dawning, Agathon. Socrates, having laid them to sleep, rose to depart; Aristodemus, as his manner was, following him. At the Lyceum he took a bath, and passed the day as usual. In the evening he retired to rest at his own home.”

With the same calmness he goes about the last banquet when he drinks the fatal cup of hemlock. Fearlessly possessing his soul during a drunken orgy of his friends, as fearlessly sending his soul away from the body on its last quest.

“Then raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison. And hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw too that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept, not for him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having to part from such a friend. Nor was I the first; for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up, and I followed; and at that moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke out in a loud and passionate cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange outcry? he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience.”

Is it any wonder that he was the charmer of enthusiastic youth and the anxious enigma of staid old age? He gath-

ers about him the best and most aristocratic youths of the city. He tries a fall again and again with the most famous sophists and dialecticians of the age, until he drives them into sullen silence and resentment, as he shows the insufficiency of their supposed wisdom. He outrages the sensibilities of those who have no rational grounds for their beliefs, and yet cling to them the more firmly as the philosopher shows their deficiencies. He will dare even to discuss gods and piety and the liturgy of worship, and proclaims that he has an inner voice that prompts and maintains him. Shocked, his enemies, those whose intolerances he had assailed, brought him to justice on charges of impiety. It was when Athens was valiantly trying to recover after the disaster of the civil wars. The popular reformers were convinced that a return to the old days of unquestioning faith was necessary to restore an unquestioning virtue—we have seen the same picture since. Socrates had offended because to be unquestioning was to him to be unhuman. He was brought to justice, condemned, and drank the hemlock.

It was logical and even fortunate, this martyrdom of Socrates. It was the fitting climax of his life; its cosmic injustice so moved the imagination of Plato that he devoted the rest of his life to a vindication of his master's memory; and finally it allows us the picture of his last days, the biographical *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, things without parallel in literature.

In the *Apology*, the speech Plato puts into his mouth, Socrates now an old man over seventy, meets his accusers before an Athenian jury. It is the model of all speeches of self-justification and a review of his philosophy of life. He makes no effort to please or placate; but delivers a frontal attack on his enemies. When he is found guilty

by a narrow majority, and is asked to propose a penalty, he ironically refuses to allow the justice of the verdict and proposes that he become a guest of the city at the public charge, an honor reserved only for the greatest patriots. This was too much, and by a larger majority the sentence of death was passed; and he takes a magnificent farewell of both friends and enemies. The story goes that Lysias, the foremost jurist of the age, offered to defend him, and doubtless would have freed him, but he refused the assistance. There is another story, and doubtless true, that his friend Apollodorus, shocked by the verdict, commiserated with the philosopher on his dying unjustly. His retort is final: "Would you rather, my dear Apollodorus, that it were *justly*?"

In the *Crito* he rises to yet greater heights. His friends have raised a fund for his release, and bribed the gaoler. He will turn his back and Socrates can go off scot-free, retire to some stranger city, and there bask in the friendship of his friends and live to ripe old age. But his friends have little understood the meaning of "justice". Granted his fate is undeserved, granted that his enemies were prompted by motives of utter injustice; will two wrongs make one right? The city has condemned him, and from its verdict there is no appeal. The city is his father and mother, it has given him life; shall he ungratefully stab it now even though one may question its wisdom? A pretty picture he will make, a pitiful figure, a renegade from his own teachings, an exiled man with no home. Law is the greatest of human institutions; what is the man, even the philosopher Socrates, to raise his heel against its jurisdiction?

Then comes the dialogue of the last day. The month that intervened between sentence and execution has passed,

the sacred ship for which Athens has been waiting is now in the harbor. The eyes of the hero may not look at the setting sun again. His friends gather early at the prison, and we have their conversation as it is set forth in the *Phaedo*. Here is a poem in prose no one can read with quite dry eyes. Calmly, and as though there were all eternity before them, Socrates begins with the utterly commonplace. His family is allowed in for a last farewell and dismissed, that their tears and lamentations may not interfere with the discourse of friends. Slowly the burden of his thought is disclosed, and the dialogue closes with the magnificent poem on immortality.

Death and immortality—the large significance of this last adventure that the searcher into the meaning of life's mysteries must face. Yet how calmly and logically the argument proceeds. The gaoler intervenes, advising the prisoner to refrain from the excitement of conversation, warning that for those who are excited two and often three doses of the poison are necessary. But Socrates, who talks the whole day through, needed but one dose. He is the calmest in the group. Plato himself could not come, ill with apprehension over the fate of his friend. As calmly he dies, with a jest on his lips. They hear him speaking of death as a release from the evils of life; will Crito please pay the doctor? He has vowed a cock to the physician god Aesculapius; the debt must be paid.

What is there in this lovable personality that makes him of value to-day? Obviously I am not here concerned with the philosophy of Plato and Socrates as it is usually served up in the stories of philosophy. Such things are admirably done elsewhere, and to repeat here would be too long a story, and create some confusion. Mine is a humbler task, and yet quite necessary. What was Socrates' wisdom?

One may deny the thing called Platonism, but one can never deny Socrates, except at one's peril.

The oracle of Delphi had once pronounced him the wisest of men; and this one correct estimate can go far to confirm our belief if not in the supernatural character, at least in the sound sense of the oracle. But Socrates ironically disclaims wisdom unless it be wise to confess that one knows *nothing*. Yet this sweeping agnosticism did not cripple the teacher. Instead it incited him to explore also the ignorance of others and their pretensions to superior knowledge, and above all, to make diligent search for man's human limitations. So his method becomes like that of the mid-wife, to assist at the delivery of any individual truth wherever it may be discovered. He questions, he answers, he leads from thought to thought, from analogy to quaint fiction, from parable to homely illustration, ironically tempting his victim on until he has tangled him in a web of paradoxes of his own weaving, until finally the central issue is at last displayed. At least, if one can ask the right sort of questions one may go far, and Socrates was a living question mark, genial, or ironical, or monitory as the occasion demanded. It was thus in all places where men congregate that he sought for those who would stir him to question, from the most haughty rich to the humblest poor. He would if he could popularize philosophy.

The tradition of Greek literature and life supplied the cue to his questions: what is success or failure, happiness or misery in life? What are the ideals men live by, how far are these translated into human conduct, how far do they contribute toward the "good life", what is the "good life"? Fundamental questions, these, and can be as concrete as the life of man, as in Homer; but can an answer be discovered

which shall reveal a hint for a science of human conduct? The world of nature can be observed, and its manner of working discovered; but nature is orderly and acts usually in a reasonably predictable manner. But man, "*ondoyant et variable*", vacillating and uncertain always, offers a far smaller target for the arrows of inquiry. It is a fascinating adventure, this, to put the citizens of Athens one by one as he caught them, in the ironic crucible of his conversation, and make them expose the texture of their souls. The oracle had called him the wisest of men; he recognized his wisdom to be an enlightened and eager ignorance. The first duty of the man who would speculate about human conduct will be to know himself.

So he adopts as his motto, *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*, know thyself. To the fortunate man to whom this shall be revealed, all other knowledge will be secondary. Let man but know himself and "the springs and wards" of his actions, and his relation to society, to the state, to the gods, to life, and to death will be a not too difficult corollary. Armed with reason, the only weapon man may trust, and moved by a supreme optimism that the problem is soluble—for to the Greek always reason is man's infallible guide, if he will but use it aright—Socrates set to work in his career as a philosopher. We have been taught to look with admiration at the patient work of the scientist who, like Tycho Brahe, spends a lifetime recording patiently night after night the exact position of the planets, that his successor, Copernicus, might discover the secret of the solar system. There is something almost pathetic in the devotion of a Newton who had to invent a new mathematics that he might begin his years of computations before he could announce his law of moving bodies. These things are dramatic because the ends so abundantly justified the labori-

ous means. Is the life of this artist soul who forsook the marble that he might work in a fluid and far more dangerous medium any less a devotion to a cause infinitely greater than his own life and love of leisure? And are the results he obtained after his forty and more years of patient search any the less dramatic and valuable?

There are two of the *Dialogues* that perhaps best serve our purpose, paradoxical in content, but both the supreme examples of Plato's exquisite art, the *Symposium* or *Banquet* and the *Phaedo*. No commentator can ever do them even scant justice. Like certain passages in the *Bible*, they have had the profoundest effect on the whole career of European thought and poetry, down, yes, to our own times. Let me set them up as two companion panels, as it were, on either side of the entrance to the temple of philosophy. Goethe in his *Wilhelm Meister* has a motto, "remember to live". This might be said to be also the theme of the *Symposium*. But against this in the other panel Plato sets the other and sometimes more somber motto, the one that Montaigne uses in his definition of philosophy: "Philosophy teaches a man how to die well." The "*memento mori*" is the theme of the *Phaedo*, "remember to die." The art of living well against the art of dying well, life and death, the two supreme mysteries of the cosmic universe as of the human,—what do these things mean? Is death the denial of life, and life the denial of death? Are these inveterate enemies? Does death, like the holes in the bridge of the *Vision of Mirza* in Addison, catch the wary like the unwary, plunging them into the stream all would if they could avoid? Surely if a man only learns to know himself rightly, he will catch some clue to the mystery of these apparently cosmic irreconcilables. Is life always to live in terror of death? Is death the end of life? If the

philosopher can show us something sweetly reasonable in this paradox he will have added one more motive for making life beautiful and death less terrible.

Yet at first sight the *Symposium* begins and ends as might any dialogue between clever club men on the night of a celebration. Agathon, the young and popular poet, has won a victory on the tragic stage and is celebrating with a banquet to which a brilliant circle of friends is invited, and of course, Socrates. They propose the subject of love for their conversation and each in turn puts his wits to service for a definition. What is love, this mysterious force both for good and for evil? Fancy and poetry mingle in its praise; Aristophanes becomes brilliantly paradoxical—the comic poet is at his best here. Agathon soars into poetical heavens, but no one seems to know much of what he is praising. Then Socrates begins, slowly as usual and with both feet on the ground. He has had one unsuccessful quest for this game before, that day he was out in the country with Phaedrus, but perhaps because of the loneliness of the spot, or the beauty of nature, or the charm of the youthful companion, the quest had led him not much farther than a warning—man has a higher and lower nature; and the lower nature is unfitted because of its very grossness to understand this love that governs both the heart of man and the dance of the stars.

“At the beginning of this tale, I divided each soul into three—two horses and a charioteer; and one of the horses was good and the other bad: the division may remain, but I have not yet explained in what the goodness or badness of either consists, and to that I will now proceed. The right-hand horse is upright and cleanly made; he has a lofty neck and an aquiline nose; his colour is white, and his eyes dark; he is a lover of honour and modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip, but is guided by word and admonition only.



The other is a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow; he has a short thick neck; he is flat-faced and of a dark colour, with grey and blood-shot eyes; the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur."

But now he has men around him and the human voice takes the place of the meaningless ripple of brooks and songs of birds. He catches his theme, "Love is the everlasting possession of the good", "wherefore love is of immortality." But not at the beginning; for love like any faculty must be awakened to its powers and learn to expand its desire for the possession of the good to ever worthier objects. It begins relatively low in the scale of worth, and gradually widens its circle of objects, never forgetting that there are degrees of worth, never forgetting the more lowly, but never losing sight also of the worthiest.

"And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is."

Temperance and justice—these two most noble ends of living—are thus but higher stages in this increasing power of love. We shall catch this theme with a new significance again in Dante, as later in Shelley. "Greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, which is called temperance and justice." Is it any wonder then that Socrates refused to be guilty of an injustice to save his own life from injustice? Living is loving, for living is love of beauty, for beauty is order, order in the fair lines of a

beautiful body, in the mind of man, in the world of society, in the vast cosmic universe, which we may call if we will the orderly handiwork of Deity. What this order is in the mind of man and in society he will explore in the *Republic*. Love is the greatest thing in the world; and all lovers of life are lovers of love, for love is active, ever widening the scope of human activity, touching life at every possible point, seeing in life this order, the synthesis which the loving mind sees reflected also in its own action. And the science of sciences is to see all life and nature as one vast harmony—when this is attained life shall reach its highest goal, and the aim of living shall be complete. This to the philosopher, who in the ecstasy of vision now has become poet, is the essence of philosophy.

The good life is one of perfect harmony. What this means we can discover in the life of Socrates himself and in his most famous dialogue, the *Republic*. Though described in the ecstasy of vision, with this hard-headed man it is no transcendental ideal. Rather it is the result of arduous discipline, very different from the naïve philosophies that of recent years have been clustering like bees about the tradition which Rousseau found on his doorstep and sentimentally adopted. Everything with these easy optimists begins and ends with right feeling. "Man is by nature good", so the argument runs, and (I am quoting Rousseau's account of his great moment of vision), "it is by our institutions alone that man becomes wicked." This is a sentiment so often heard at popular meetings that we have almost come to believe it; but Socrates would have filed a minority report. Against this naïve trust in feeling, he had the conviction that goodness is achieved only when disciplined reason is given the unquestioning obedience of

both feeling and will. For reason is the divine faculty in man, the thing that distinguishes him from the brute, and only by living under its rule can man elevate himself above the brute and hope to meet all the situations of life with safety and equanimity.

In the same way Socrates would answer another philosophy of to-day, also a favorite with a few who would consider themselves realists and disillusioned. I am thinking of the extreme interpreters of some modern theories of psychology who would have it that all values are purely relative and depend upon habit or tradition. To such, conscience is merely a check which tells us when we are transgressing convention, like the discomfort a well-dressed person may feel from a smudge of soot on his nose or an unfortunate remark before a roomful of company. Against these the Greek humanist would urge the vital difference between an act due to deliberate reason and an automatic gesture as meaningless as the tipping of one's hat. Both have their standards of value, but they belong to different realms. And the whole life of Socrates, as of every vital personality, is a justification of a will guided not by instinct or feeling, but by the severely disciplined reason.

Let us use the word decorum, the ideal of the gentleman, as the thing that distinguished the life of Socrates. One catches it in every crisis of his life. The soldier who retreated in order, disdaining panic as the stigma of the unresolute; the guest at the banquet who could more than hold his own in the debate as well as carousal; the stern advocate of justice who refused to admit that two wrongs make a right; the martyr who quiets the lamentation of his friends and dies with a solemn jest on his lips,—heroic decorum, the good life. We shall meet this ideal of the

gentleman later, but it will never prove itself more wholly admirable.

But it is the same ideal that has been striving to achieve a definition in all Greek tragedy and even comedy. Achilles, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Medea, trace for us in one region after another the havoc wrought in human personality by conduct or temperament that for a moment has lost its intelligible cue. Achilles in wrath, Oedipus "perplexed in the extreme", Agamemnon victim of a code beyond his control, Medea in a frenzy of jealousy—these things are not pretty; they mark the waste of most excellent material, shipwrecked because of a lack of reason's control. Each a magnificent personality, fitted and eager for the good life, but flawed by some sudden collapse of reason, they are swept by currents beyond their control to disaster.

This love of harmony is also an ideal that escapes the arid desert of asceticism as it does also the perfumed but often poisonous garden of pleasure for its own sake. It can endure pleasure, for it knows by an accurate standard of values how to discover its true worth. "*Homo sum nihil alienum humani mihi puto*": "I am a man and all human life is my world", might well have been spoken by this man who in the art of living was the true amateur. He was yet optimistic, even though he had seen evil prosper and himself had known the bitterest injustice. There is none of the austerity of the professed philosopher in any of his dialogues; for the sunshine and the clear air of Attica had mellowed his nature as it does the grapes and olives of its hillsides. To the end he retains his genial love of life, jesting on his last day when the fetters are finally taken from his legs:

"And when she was gone, Socrates, sitting up on the couch, bent and rubbed his leg, saying, as he was rubbing: 'How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be

the opposite of it; for they are never present to a man at the same instant, and yet he who pursues either is generally compelled to take the other; their bodies are two, but they are joined by a single head.' ”

“Wherefore love is of immortality”—this is the note, reached as the climax in the *Symposium*, which becomes the main theme of the *Phaedo*. The quest of immortality has become an obsession of the human race from the beginning. Homer, though not deeply involved, sends out several tentative expeditions and brings back nothing greatly impressive. With Socrates, as Plato pictures him at his passing, the discovery of the transcendent world seems to become the keystone of the arch of his endeavor. The argument is not difficult to follow. As the world of harmony in which the good life is passed becomes wider and wider in scope, its nature becomes more and more spiritual, revealing thus the larger and ever larger significance of man's reason in a universe whose secret nature is reason itself—a transcendent world of reason in which the white horse of man's better nature ultimately finds its true home. The sombre, groveling horse, needing whip and spur, is the mortal, the earthly, the thing of fitful irrational passion. Its region is this earth, which also shall pass. But the other, it is of the nature of reality itself. Death then is but an episode, no more to be dreaded than the lesser incidents of life, for those who know reality; and the passage of death the ministration of a physician who relieves life of earthly encumbrance.

But does the vision of reality, as Socrates caught it, demand of its sympathetic reader the complete acceptance of a life after death? Can the thoughtful humanist to-day who would tread in the footsteps of his thought refuse this supreme assent, and yet not lose the central theme of his

philosophy of the good life? I sincerely believe this feat to be possible.

Socrates achieved immortality, achieved it in this life, as may also another, in the glimpse he caught of the supreme significance of the human reason—the richest thing in the world, the only thing of supreme value, personality the measurer of all things, fortified by the faith that it is living in a universe to which reason is the clue. How different, this, from the philosophies so often peddled of man's utter insignificance and a world in which man's utmost effort brings nothing more than his bubbling cry as he sinks in the abyss of unreason. Life on the contrary is an ever-widening opportunity, not a living death as the ascetic would proclaim, nor a preparation for the life to come as might say those hopeful of future rewards. It bears its own rewards in its hands, instead of searching for an anodyne in the intoxication of pleasure.

“Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!  
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!  
The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,  
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!”

To such as perceive this larger meaning in living, philosophy has revealed the highest wisdom, and this in itself is immortality, and its vision brings the *sursum corda* of enthusiastic endeavor instead of the inhibitions and bewilderments of lesser men. Thus Socrates the philosopher falls into the tradition of Homer the poet; life is still the glorious adventure in search of new and richer horizons; his chart is human nature and his compass man's faith in himself.

Is it any wonder that Socrates was the favorite of enthusiastic youth? His own life was an *Odyssey* in which the

climax found him yet unafraid and without disillusionment. His last act is his most magnificent gesture of all. He was great in life, he was greater in his death. But his doctrine was a hard one for those who want a simple answer to the riddle of life and who persistently look away from themselves for some external code of conduct. It was these who administered to him the poison; it was the same spirit that later when paganism itself was on trial could not see that in him it had its only adequate defense.

## II. THE AFTERMATH

"Philosophy requireth nothing of thee, but what thy nature requireth."

MARCUS AURELIUS.

Socrates gave his life to popularize philosophy, to make of it a guide for all to the good life; but paradox of paradoxes, he became the wedge that gradually drove between life and philosophy, until in the sequel we see almost a complete severance. In the little city-state of Athens, the hero failed and was put to death for his pains; in the great world of paganism he was ignored save by the chosen few, who though often admirable, gave a twist to his thought until it became almost unrecognizable. More and more philosophy came to mean an austere retirement from life, or a participation without one spark of generous adventure. Philosophy suddenly grew old. Its eyes clear only for ideals, became misty for the contemplation of meaner objects. With its head in the clouds, it gave scant attention to the needs of its feet. But most people think oftener of their feet than of their heads.

The world had grown old. The ancient rivalries in ancient Greece had kept the citizen alert and thoughtful; these were the days of an early summer, bright and full of

promise, and also of the threat of storm. Confident, resourceful, but ever alert for danger, the states had bred men to whom the spice of adventure was the motive for life, even the adventure of poetry and science. But now with the world all Roman, administered by Roman law and procurators, proconsuls, consuls, and emperors, there was little chance that life could offer much in the way of novelty. Wealth and luxury learned an artificiality of manners and amusement that has been rivalled only in our own times. Against it was the world of slaves and outcasts, a horde always on the brink of starvation, or living in the retinue of the more fortunate. Life had become one vast routine—social order and standardization, political order broken only by the elevation of a new emperor, military order with adventure only on the frontiers with the restless barbarian, intellectual and moral order with a code of education and manners as standardized as the most efficient pedagogue might wish to-day. It was superb, but left little for the imagination. Only the moralist can thrive in this atmosphere, the moralist and the satirist. There were many of both.

Religion, too, as a national thing, somehow had evaporated with the enthusiastic adventure of living. From being a faith and a means of reconciling man and nature, it now in its numerous cults became a superstition, a thing only for the emotional thrills of its liturgies. The old gods were dead or dying—a *Götterdämmerung*—a twilight of the Olympian celestials, and the oracles were dumb. The thing has happened since. And the cosmic universe was ransacked, north, east, south, west, for newer cults, all thronging to Rome and greedily adopted by vacant lives which hungrily sought in them the food their imaginations and their emotions craved. Read the success of the



prophet Apollonius of Tyana, who for a time seemed to have given the Eastern Empire a new Messiah. Read in Lucian the frantic efforts of religious charlatans to dazzle the mind of the illustrious obscure. All Rome, the Roman world, became a forcing bed for exotic creeds and moral or immoral cults. The names of the new gods are a directory of obscenity, and ignorant superstition.

Above this wilderness of weeds philosophy strove to raise its head, pointing to the stars, and gathering its robe about it to avoid pollution. At times—and very rarely—philosophy becomes literature. It achieved the miracle with Plato. Lucretius with his long poem *de Rerum Natura*, on the Nature of Things, is a precious and intimate masterpiece, revealing more of the poet's personality even than of his sincere philosophy. Of all great poets, ancient and modern, this man of whose life we know exactly nothing, is the most modern. His poem is an essay in science, but far more the vivid portrait of a man who accepts the harshest of pessimism and yet can look the world in the face unafraid.

The Providence that Socrates had discovered in this world and whose inner voice is the voice of the higher reason, has now disappeared; and in its place there is the world orderly and inevitable, a reign of cosmic law that man, with all his innate ideas on freedom, cannot escape. He has only his reason, and this alone he can trust—it cannot take him out of the cosmic order, but it can make him understand, and if he be wise, submit to nature and nature's law. It alone can never deceive him. "*Nam neque decipitur ratio, nec decipit unquam.*" Reason is never deceived, nor deceives. The words are by another and later poet, but the thought is that of Lucretius, as he stands contemplating the majestic calm of the stars and the tem-

pestuous whirl of men. These are things that the philosopher may understand, and in understanding, find compensation for living. Reason is his god, and in it he puts all his trust, for by it he is united to the treasury of reason in the universe.

The ignorant man is full of superstition—and this unreasonable vice is the mother of countless ills—he is blind to his powers and his destiny.

“O misery of men! O blinded fools! in what dark mazes, in what dangers we walk this little journey of our life!”

And these miseries and dangers are the lot of man from birth to the grave.

“Death is accompanied with the wailing which babes raise the moment they first see the light; no night follows day, nor dawn the night, that has not mingled the moanings of the sick with the cries of children, attendants on death and the grave.”

Death is for all and eternal, but the thought does not dismay him.

“Never are the gates of death barred to the heavens or the earth or the depths of the watery ocean; but vast it stands and awaits with widened jaws. . . .

“Nor do we subtract aught from the eternity of death by prolonging life, nor can we escape being carried off by death though its footsteps linger. Wherefore however long may be these years we spend in life, yet that eternal state of death will still remain, and will not be less long to him who has ended his life today than to him who perished months and years before.”

There is but one escape from this misery, the refuge in reason and philosophy. We must not, like the child terrified by the dark, tremble before the unknown, for to reason and nature, the known and the unknown are both

equally reasonable and inevitable. From this elevation one may contemplate life and even be content.

"'Tis sweet, when seas are roughened by violent winds, to view on land the toils of others. . . . 'Tis pleasant to look, with no share of trouble on the mighty contests of war. But nothing is sweeter than to reach those calm, unruffled temples, raised by the wisdom of philosophers, whence thou mayest look down on poor mistaken mortals wandering up and down life's devious ways, some resting their fame on genius, or priding themselves on birth, day and night toiling anxiously to rise to high fortune and sovereign power."

This is the Epicurean Lucretius. Much the same story of life is read by the Stoic Epictetus.

"As in a voyage, when the ship is at anchor, if you go on shore to get water you may amuse yourself with picking up a shellfish, or an onion, in your way, but your thoughts ought to be bent towards the ship, and perpetually attentive lest the captain should call, and then you must leave all these things, that you may not be thrown into the vessel, bound neck and heels like a sheep: thus likewise in life, if, instead of an onion or a shellfish, such a thing as a wife or a child be granted you, there is no objection; but if the captain calls, run to the ship, leave all these things, regard none of them. But if you are old, never go far from the ship; lest, when you are called, you should be unable to come in time."

But great literature is the story of these toils the Stoic renounces or the pearl or seashell that the philosopher handles too lightly. Poetry is the story of man's conflicts in the world which the philosopher now seems to disdain. This last seeks perfection in an ascetic abstinence and in a life that shall make reason and the will of God, if there be a God, prevail. Poetry tells the story often of man's defeats, and the times when reason could not be discovered and the will of God seemed of no avail. Does this mean that when all men are perfect there can be no great poetry. Is this question a blasphemy?

There was one more great pagan, philosopher, friend, emperor, soldier, whom this story must not forget, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. To him, if to any, can be applied the words of the poet Manlius: "*Exemplum Dei quisque est in imagine parva.*" Only his image of the Deity is not small. A sweet soul if ever there was one, affectionate as his diary and his relations with his family show; yet placed in a hard world, in a day when faith was dead; given a task against which his philosophic nature must have revolted; fond of beauty yet forced to the life of a soldier and to spend his days on the frontiers of the empire repelling the invading hordes; jotting down for his own perusal his intimate thoughts and encouraging his flagging energy—the man Marcus Aurelius is one of the greatest and most sympathetic figures of pagan history. Christian Europe must look far to discover his fellow.

Duty—this is the word one meets repeated like a refrain in the *Meditations*: not duty as a task imposed by some foreign taskmaster, but that higher thing that the reasonable soul recognizes and gladly embraces. There is nothing common or trivial or vulgar in this book. Though he saw the meanness of many of the experiences that even the life of an emperor must discover, they do not bring the recoil of disgust—or perhaps he chides his sensitive soul for recoiling.

"Betimes in the morning say to thyself, This day I shall have to do with an idle curious man, with an unthankful man, a railer, a crafty, false, or an envious man; an unsocial uncharitable man. All these ill qualities have happened unto them, through ignorance of that which is truly good and truly bad. But I that understand the nature of that which is good, that it only is to be desired, and of that which is bad, that it only is truly odious and shameful; who know, moreover, that this transgressor, whosoever he be is my kinsman, not by the same blood and seed, but by participation of the same reason, and of the same divine particle; how can I

either be hurt by any of those, since it is not in their power to make me incur anything that is truly reproachful? Or angry, and ill affected toward him, who by nature is so near to me?"

It is an intimate book, though it gives no hint of any of the external details of his life. The next passage perhaps was written after the death of his wife whom he dearly cherished. It detracts not a whit from its genuine sincerity to be told that she may have been unworthy of his love.

"Oh, wretched I, to whom this mischance is happened! nay, happy I, to whom this thing being happened, I can continue without grief; neither wounded by that which is present, nor in fear of that which is to come. . . . Now to conclude; upon all occasions of sorrow remember henceforth to make use of this dogma, that whatsoever it is that hath happened unto thee, is in very deed no such thing, of itself, as a misfortune; but to bear it generously is certainly great happiness."

One catches in such passages precisely the place philosophy had come to occupy in the minds of these heroes of reason. Where others look for the comforts of a religion of the other world, or to gods or God, or to human friends, these invincible spirits look only to themselves, to their own resources. Here is an individualism as stark as anything the world has ever seen; a resourcefulness that is almost tragic in its refusal to discover comfort except in the imperturbability of nature herself, where comfort and discomfort are both meaningless.

"Our life is a warfare, and a mere pilgrimage. Fame after life is no better than oblivion. What is it then that will adhere and follow? Only one thing, philosophy. And philosophy doth consist in this, for a man to preserve that spirit which is within him, from all manner of contumelies and injuries, and above all pains or pleasures; never to do anything either rashly, or feignedly, or hypocritically: wholly to depend from himself, and his own proper actions: all things that happen unto him to embrace contentedly, as coming from Him from whom he himself also came; and

above all things, with all meekness and a calm cheerfulness, to expect death, as being nothing else but the resolution of those elements, of which every creature is composed."

Socrates' Providence is a personal spirit; here Providence is not greatly different from Lucretius' Law of Nature, for both are as inevitable as the laws of mathematics and as beautiful in their rationality. To this impersonality a man can retire, as an ascetic recluse, when the cares of the world become too bewildering and its apparent tragedies too heavy to bear.

"At what time soever thou wilt, it is in thy power to retire into thyself, and to be at rest, and free from all businesses. A man cannot any whither retire better than to his own soul; he especially who is beforehand provided of such things within, which whensoever he doth withdraw himself to look in, may presently afford unto him perfect ease and tranquillity. By tranquillity I understand a decent orderly disposition and carriage, free from all confusion and tumultuousness."

But it is precisely because the human attitude is to be pleased and displeased, to set great store on the passing moment, and to judge its value by its emotional reaction, that such doctrine is too serene, too refined for the jaded nerves of the later Roman Empire. The religion of Marcus Aurelius is possible only in a world of his moral and spiritual peers. It was a "hard saying", far too hard for common acceptance.

Nor does it leave larger room for man's instinctive plea for spiritual freedom and immortality. The Cosmic Order, or Providence, is Fate. To Virgil it was identified with the splendid destiny of Rome and its Emperor. Here is a disillusioned emperor, no optimistic Augustus who could dream of a Golden Age to be secured through the *Imperium Romanum* and a reign of law and order. Order

and administrative efficiency and justice had been established, but the heart of man yet remained empty and his imagination unsatisfied. Not through any external machinery of social or political institutions could man's ancient malady be cured. And the vision of a world process as unyielding to the inner wants of the individual as the laws of logic and mathematics is thin comfort to unsatisfied longing.

In the place of comfort he offers reason and contentment. Man's reason is free—free to submit to the higher reason that moves atoms and stars. He may rebel and live the life of passion—and tragedy: he may submit and live the coldly pallid life of reason and disillusioned contentment. There is no alternative. In one he is a gear in a machine that refuses to see that it is a gear and grows overheated in imaginative revolt, never ceasing for a moment, however, to remain what he was; in the other he painlessly and noiselessly performs his allotted task. Which attitude is the more admirable? The philosophical emperor chooses without hesitation.

"Let it be thy earnest and incessant care as a Roman and a man to perform whatsoever it is that thou art about, with true and unfeigned gravity, natural affection, freedom and justice: and as for all other cares, and imaginations, how thou mayest ease thy mind of them. Which thou shalt do; if thou shalt go about every action as thy last action, free from all vanity, all passionate and wilful aberration from reason, and from all hypocrisy, and self-love, and dislike of those things, which by the fates or appointment of God have happened unto thee."

The "Bankruptcy of Paganism." Paganism was at its best when it was least able to control the imaginative life of the ancient world. The multitude asked for a creed that could warm their hearts, free their imaginations, show the infinite in the finite, the divine in the human, discover

a deeper meaning in personality, give them a faith that could remove mountains, permit a belief in the impossible (*"credo quia impossibile est"*), discover a motive for self-sacrifice and martyrdom, bring God down among men, touch the heart of the slave and the outcast with the promise of their ineffable and infinite worth; all this and more is latent in the philosophy of Socrates—but with the warning that man must discover the way himself, and the way was too arid even for the Greek imagination. The world now was looking for a faith on which it could lean, something on which even the weak in reason could wholly rely, and Stoicism offered this instead:

"Whatsoever doth happen unto thee, thou art naturally by thy natural constitution either able, or not able to bear. If thou beest able, be not offended, but bear it according to thy natural constitution, or as nature hath enabled thee. If thou beest not able, be not offended. For it will soon make an end of thee, and itself (whatsoever it be), at the same time end with thee."

To the unthinking this looked like the surrender of defeat instead of a hard-won victory, and the world took the road in the steps of the man of Nazareth. Philosophy and life seemed a paradox impossible to resolve. Must man give up philosophy? It was a thousand years before history could discover a poet or philosopher ready to accept the mantle of Virgil or Marcus Aurelius.





## VII. KAMA, KARMA AND NIRVANA

"So, dropping all Desires, the Man  
Who walks in full release  
From every lust of 'I' and 'Mine',  
Attains the perfect peace."

*Bhagavat Gita.*

It is an early summer night in the remote Himalayas. A village group has gathered in the precarious little courtyard; the smoke from the evening fires comes pungently to the nostrils; a cool wind comes across from the snow-clad peaks. But the little circle sits enthralled, for in its center, modulating his voice to an old-time *sithara*, sits the errant minstrel, singing the verses of the *Ramayana*. This is one of my earliest childhood memories. The words are in a language long consecrated to poetry and religion. Few in the group, least of all I, can understand a syllable. But all know the story of the royal Rama and the wifely Sita. It would be a sacrilege to transpose its sacred poetry into the vernacular.<sup>1</sup> The wind may be chill. The animals may restlessly stroll about the group waiting impatiently for the night's refuge in the huts. Even the night meal may be delayed. But this is India's heritage of poetry, sung in village and royal palace for two thousand years. For the moment all temporal problems have disappeared and the people are in the grip of an old tradition.

<sup>1</sup> There is a popular Hindi version of the *Ramayana* by Tulsi Das.

It was thus in the days of ancient Greece, only the tradition was of shorter duration. Homer to Europe and America now is a book in a strange tongue to be read painfully by scholars and students in second year Greek. Those who in the old days listened to the sacred rhapsodist now turn the pages of *True Story*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Vogue*, or gape at the thrilling vacuities of the popular "movie".

India has a large heritage of poetry. India has cultivated assiduously for millenniums the study and practice of philosophy, and this philosophy in turn has made itself concrete in poetry and drama and fiction. And though it is only in relatively recent years that Indian poetry has become widely known in our Occident, the influence of its ideas was felt even in ancient Greece. How deeply it has affected modern Europe a very cursory glance will easily discover. That the Middle Ages was in many ways the counter-thrust of the Orient on the Occident we are only beginning to discover; it was almost a conquest. It will be interesting and instructive to pass some of the great poems of the Sanscrit literature in review. Though its golden age is now more than fifteen hundred years past, it is as vital in Indian life to-day as ever; and modern Indian literature more and more is returning to its own past for refreshment and inspiration.

It is a strange fascination India has ever had for Europe. For a moment, as the Orient measures time, the Empire of Alexander set up the Greek ensigns on the "five waters" of the Punjab. But even before and long after the western imagination thrilled at stories by travelers of its mystery and splendor. For all it was the land of the imagination's desire, where impossibles become real and the commonplace never intrudes. And though in these later days of prose and radio, the poetry, some of it, has evaporated

and the ugly has become only too obvious, enough charm remains to entice the traveler and the scholar in search of significant novelty.

Who are the peoples of India? When did they come to India and whence? What is their history? These are puzzling questions, to which each historian returns almost such answers as best suit his purpose. Indian history is almost as unanswerable to historical science as the "absolute elsewhere" to the laws of physics. There are innumerable Indian historians who left minute studies of dynasties, kings, and cities—only it is hard to tell when, or who, or where. To the Indian imagination a few centuries ago, time was as relative as it is to the new physics—or to the Hebrew biographies of the patriarchs before the flood. That there were people who called themselves Aryans; that they entered India from the Northwest; that they were close brothers to the Persians who shortly before entered the highlands of Persia; that they brought with them an Indo-European language, the Sanscrit; that they slowly through the centuries extended their power as they conquered or absorbed the original Dravidians; that there were repeated invasions after theirs, as perhaps before, like that of Alexander the Great; that their earliest poetry contained some of those exquisite nature and liturgical lyrics we know as the Vedas—all this we know and not much else, before the fifth century before Christ.

We also know that by the fifth century before Christ the people were well established in the country, with stable institutions and feudal states at times merged by a powerful dynasty like the Guptas into an empire not different from the empire of the Babylonians. Only India, like Europe, preserved long the tradition of smaller states and divided peoples. The caste system was well established even before

the first century. Life had become organized, even professionalized, and a literary and learned caste made ready to sing the praises of kings and heroes, write their laws, preside over the intricate religious liturgies, and to lend the charm of their culture to palace and court. Early India as we first see it was rich, cultured, poetical, and full of promise. Then there came two events of the first magnitude.

Alexander the Great invaded India, and for some centuries there persisted after the conqueror's retreat and death, the semblance of a Graeco-Bactrian culture. In one respect it was not unlike the present occupation of India by the British. Two cultures came into contact that had little in common. The effect on Indian art, in spite of the protests of extreme Indian nationalists, was extraordinary. And we may well believe, though evidence will never be forthcoming, that the influence on literature was equally profound. Touring troupes of players might easily and probably did visit the little Greek courts, with repertoires of Euripides and Menander, Greek tragedy and comedy. That these influenced the course of the Indian drama we at least may be allowed to speculate. But India took the dramatic form in its own manner, and gave it a spirit that is wholly Oriental, as it does to-day with the plays of Shakespeare for a bazar audience. Again—and here the evidence is yet more slender—I suspect that the example of the recitations of Homer and the plots of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had their influence in shaping the form of the great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. But again the spirit of these two mighty works is wholly of the East. Be this as it may, the memory of this European hero, who stretched his empire in a decade, from Sicily to the Ganges, is a potent thing in the Orient, and his name

is yet mentioned with pious horror in many a village folk-tale.

But before the material conquest of the European adventurer, there was the spiritual conquest of Prince Sakya-muni, who was to be known to the world as "the enlightened", Gautma Buddha. This spiritual leader is in reality one of the world's greatest heroes, and yet a man who more completely than any other renounced the world. We can picture to ourselves the background against which to draw the figure of Jesus; it, like the man himself, belongs to history clear and verifiable. We can sketch in with unmistakable lines the scenes in Mecca and Medina at the time of the coming of the prophet of Islam. But who was this prince of India, what were the social and political conditions of India, when he like a flash illuminated men's imaginations? What was his date? All these questions we can only speculate on. It must have been a period of national disaster and closely felt pain. There is a world weariness in this thoughtful prince that no Greek, in the days of Greek adventure, could ever have known. India is a land that has from time immemorial felt the heavy hand of the conqueror; India has since the earliest days built a social system of prejudices and class barriers such as the West has never known. All these the youth felt, and above them the pain that is the mystery of life, the travail of birth and the pangs of death, and false allurements of hope and the darkness of despair. There is only one anodyne for the poison and pain of life, a philosophy that thinkers before him had discovered but which he boldly translated into a code for life.

*Maya, Karma, Nirvana*—these words have been bandied about by *swamis* and propagators of esoteric cults until their full significance is lost in a borrowed perfume of poetry.

But there is no poetry in these attitudes as Buddha lived and taught them, only the sternest of reality. They are to him the only reality; all else crumbles and evaporates. This world of sense and desire is an illusion, *Maya*; and so long as desire persists and men naïvely believe in the ultimate reality of the things they see and set their hearts upon, they will remain the dupes of their own senses, which also are *Maya*. Man's most cherished possession, the thing that first and last he clings to with passionate devotion, his personality, itself is *Maya*, a bubble only of the spirit of the cosmic universe, that will again drop back and be lost in the immensity of being. Only when this last and greatest truth is learned and lived can man escape the pains of living and its perpetual disillusionment. Only when reality is known to be a denial of all that sense and aspiration and desire cling to can man escape to the state of perpetual absorption in spirit—the sea of being, the ultimate reality—*Nirvana*. This the wise man knows, and when the enlightenment comes he is freed, as was Buddha.

For all others life is a perpetual recurrence, in a scale of existence for which their past deeds have fitted them, the doctrine of birth and rebirth, the chain of life, link on link forged by *Karma*, the cosmic law of retribution. The base, ignorant, and passionate at each successive birth find themselves in a yet worse state, until perchance a ray of light pierces their understanding and they begin to value themselves aright, when the scales tip and each new appearance finds them better placed for the final act of renunciation.

A defeatist philosophy of life? Perhaps. At least India took it, in the centuries before Christ, and has lived it consistently these two millennia. It is an escape from pain by a denial of pain; but it goes farther, for of all philosophies it is the most consistent, it also denies pleasure—ex-

cept the highest, personal extinction in the cosmic vacuity of *Nirvana*. Here all distinctions finally disappear, all ignorance as all knowledge is vain, all accomplishment void. Life, all existence, is a meaningless sport in a cosmic game whose rules are illusion, and whose duration is only so long as the players think the counters to be real. The wise see that winning and losing are both meaningless, sweep away the counters, fold up the board, and are as though they were not. For in the final reality players, counters, board are all one, and nothing.

"If the red slayer think he slays,  
The slain think he be slain,  
They err; the slayer vainly kills;  
The victim dies in vain."

But this denial of life, read literally, would mean an extinction of every human society and institution and ultimately of life itself. It is a hard saying—nay impossible, save for the sage. Is there no compromise that shall leave room for living, and for those precious things, society, the home, the unworldly and worldly duties by which men live, and to which somehow man ever must attach at least a secondary value? Is all life a bitterness of birth and death? Is there nothing for man but this final renunciation that leaves him in a universe emptied of human values? What will literature and poetry, in a world where literature and poetry are precious ministers to life, have to say to this hard doctrine? Is the plain prose of life ever to be in conflict with the warmth of poetry? Are all human values to be lost in an immediately desired *Nirvana*? In the philosophy that was to be orthodox in Europe for centuries there hangs the scarlet memento, "the wages of sin is death"; but here is discovered a motto startling in its novelty,

"the wages of sin is life." How shall we understand this new motive? The answer to this paradox is discovered in all great Sanscrit poetry. The exploration should be worth the effort.

The *Mahabharata*, a poem so huge that alone it is evidence almost sufficient to prove the doctrine of *Karma*, tells a story of a dynastic war which recalls the story of Troy. The historical background must be early, but the stage of culture revealed shows an advanced feudal aristocracy, small kings, and the vivid contention among claimants for larger empire. Caste is already well established. The family is the communal unit, and as in Rome, the father, or elder brother is an autocrat. An unusual thing in early literature, and characteristic of all classical Sanscrit poetry, is the high position of woman. Of all the characters, the women are the most attractive, though there is a tendency toward a fixed type. But she is always, while not the intellectual or moral equal of her husband, at least his companion. Her devotion is beyond admiration—but we anticipate. The story itself is relatively simple, almost as downright as that of the *Iliad*; but poets—no one hand, no hundred hands, could have completed this architectural colossus—have added episodes, books of wisdom, homilies, allegories, every variety of religious, ethical, and romantic complication, to lend charm to the poem or to gain a hearing for their meditations, until the story is lost in the morass of the countless irrelevant *slokas*.

But to the plot—When Pandu, a king in Upper India, died, his brother, Dhrita-rashtra, took the throne during the minority of the royal princes. These are five boys, the Pandavas as they are called after their father; Yudhishtir, the wise eldest, Bhima, the strong, Arjuna, the gallant, the two youngest are relatively unimportant. But in the



meanwhile the uncle, who has the throne, has raised a family of a hundred who enjoy the privilege of royalty, especially Duryodhana, the eldest and most arrogant. Of course there are quarrels which the gentle king tries to avert; a tournament is held and Arjuna is sweeping everything before him when a new hero appears, Karna, a mystery, who allies himself to the house of a hundred sons, the Kuravas, and the victory is undecided.

As a ruse the five brothers are sent to a neighbor city, where the house they are living in is set on fire. They escape into the jungle, become wanderers, but in the course of their adventures win a beautiful maiden, Draupadi, as bride. (Is she wife to all five? Is this a reminiscence of an early state of polyandry? The poet takes the unusual situation without remark). But Draupadi is a heroine worthy of any five combined heroes. She is superb. Then back they come to court; their claims are too patent to be ignored, and a little kingdom is given them at Indraprastha. Local legend finds this spot near the present city of Delhi. The cousins have their throne some fifty miles away at Hastinapura on the Ganges.

But this arrangement is too good to be true, and rivalries break out. Duryodhana has imperial ambitions, and a lure is planned. Yudhishtir is frank and unsuspecting, and they invite him to a gambling match with loaded dice. Gambling was a gentleman's pastime in early India, a simpler way of despoiling a victim than the more romantic western manner of bludgeons and ambush. Piece by piece his property is stripped from him, he loses his kingdom, his wealth, his brothers, himself, and finally even the princess wife. From kings they have all become slaves. The old king frees their persons, but they are banished for a period of ten years and retire into the forest. But these resourceful

brothers improve their time in retirement. They listen to cantos of interminable advice from sages; hear exquisite poetic stories, like those of Nala and Damayanti and Savitri—excellent stories both of wifely devotion even unto death and beyond—all to comfort the heart of Draupadi; and what is more to their purpose, they get allies against the day when their exile will be over.

Finally they have but one year left. This they must spend in hiding while the jealous cousins look for them; if they are discovered they forfeit their claims. There is a bit of Oriental humor here as the poet describes their various disguises. Bhima, the huge, becomes a cook; Arjuna, the gallant, hides under the appearance of a court eunuch; Draupadi becomes a serving maid; and all goes well until the little kingdom where they are hiding is raided by Duryodhana himself. The year is over and the brothers spring to its defense and drive off the invaders. Then they proclaim themselves and ask for their rights. The rest of the story is the long-drawn-out description of the huge war, with allies, like Agamemnon's, from all over India. Every hero manages to get himself into action and most are killed. The Kuravas are exterminated and the rightful heirs put on the throne. The story ends not with the victory, as a western poem would, but with expiation. A huge sacrifice is ordained and the empire, now achieved, is consolidated. Finally the brothers accompanied by the faithful Draupadi renounce the world and its desires, retire to the sacred Himalayas, toiling ever upward, until one by one they drop dead and Yudhishtir achieves the heaven of the gods.

If the *Mahabharata* is the poem chiefly in celebration of war, and its ideal, the princely warrior and emperor; the *Ramayana* is the poem of peace and domestic devotion.

War here is a disagreeable necessity and waged only against demons who long have merited their fate. This is the poem which is the great popular favorite, and whose characters are a household word in the remotest village.

The Indian imagination has a large place for demons, Rakshahs. Now one, Ravana, had through the practice of abnormal austerities become so powerful that even the gods could not withstand him. His home was in Lanka, Ceylon, but his powerful cohorts were encroaching on the sacred land of the two great rivers, the Ganges and Jumna, and were setting at naught the devotion of the forest hermits. Something must be done, and at once. So the great god Vishnu has himself incarnated in three brothers, the sons of King Dasa-ratha. Rama, the eldest, has half the divine potency, his brother Lakshmana a third, and the youngest, whose part in the story is negligible, has the rest.

The poem opens with the happy prosperity of the kingdom and the exceeding promise of Rama the young prince. In a great tournament at a neighbor kingdom he wins in a trial of the bow the hand of the supernal Sita; the wedding is celebrated; and the happy couple come in complete happiness to the palace. The king is old and now that his eldest son is ready to take over the power, he has him proclaimed the future king. But a domestic unpleasantness follows. The king's younger wife, a spoiled darling, has in an uxorious moment, gained a promise from the old king and now demands its fulfillment. It is to unmake Rama and proclaim her son Bharata.

The king is disconsolate. His son Rama is his favorite; but a promise is a promise, though made in a moment of weakness to a young and pretty wife. To ensure peace for the new king, the hero must go into banishment for ten years. Rama obediently consents, he accepts his brother

Lakshmana's loyal company, but attempts to dissuade his bride. The forest ways will be too severe for her tender feet. But Sita courageously accepts her husband's lot.

"For the faithful woman follows where her wedded lord may lead,  
In the banishment of Rama, Sita's exile is decreed,

Sire nor son nor loving brother rules the wedded woman's state,  
With her lord she falls or rises, with her consort courts her fate,

If the righteous son of Raghu wends to forest dark and drear,  
Sita steps before her husband wild and thorny paths to clear!"

Even Bharata protests he will not deprive his brother of his rights. But Rama is inflexible; a promise is sacred; his father's promise is involved and his character. Rama himself has accepted the exile and may not now recall his words. The new king accepts the throne, but only for the ten years. He begs his brother's shoes which he places on the throne—an exquisite gesture—and himself uses a humbler seat of power.

Now begins the main theme of the poem. Rama's exile was not an evil—far from it. Nor was that of the brothers Pandava in the other poem. They were instead occasions for opening the heroes' eyes to the meaning of life. In the forests they came upon the lonely hermitages, learned the way of salvation through renunciation, and the hard life brought its own compensations, the beauty of nature, simple needs and easy satisfactions. It was a return to nature and the natural way of living. There they learned love and loyalty and truth. Always there is in the poet's mind, from the earliest to Tagore, the feeling that away from the court and city may be discovered those values without which the way of salvation may never be found. Does this turn our thoughts to the Middle Ages?

But danger may lurk even in the forest. Rama has more than once encountered and dismayed the demons, until his fame has traveled as far as the court of Ravana. The demon's sister comes north to investigate, incited by a not unnatural feminine curiosity. She beholds the brothers, and, alas for all, falls in love. Rama courteously explains that he is very much married and offers her to Lakshmana. Lakshmana as a younger brother proffers his older brother who by law is allowed more than one wife. The thing becomes embarrassing to all; and the younger boy at length in a fit of anger draws his sword and cuts off the she-demon's nose. It is hardly the way to treat a lady, even though she belong to a forbidden race, and in frightful anger she flies for revenge to her powerful brother. It is the doctrine of *Karma* now at work. The act is not pious, though an impious personage has been outraged. Courtesy at least would have discovered a better way. Like the fatal greed that prompted the game of dice, here a fatal personal grudge becomes the seed of bitter experience for all.

Ravana instantly flies off with Sita and imprisons her in his fortress; and Rama must make war, long and bloody, to win her back. The story is a long one. He wins the aid of Hanuman, the god of the monkeys—a very popular god, this, whose image is in every home. Prodigies of valor are displayed, such military prowess as would have made Homer and Virgil gasp. There are scenes of pathos, and grotesque pictures of insensate rage. Then Sita is rescued. The poem surely ought to end here with a loving reconciliation between husband and long-absent wife. Sita whose constancy none can doubt should now be taken by her husband, conducted to court, as the ten years are over, and restored to her full rank as queen.

But no—this is India, the land of *Maya*. There must be no possible doubt in the mind of even the most obscure that the heart of Sita ever for a moment swerved in its loving faith to her husband. A huge funeral pyre is built and solemnly lighted, with Sita in the midst. If fire touches her, her guilt is assured; if she is unharmed, the gods have intervened and her character is above reproach. The Indian gods, in these stories, are ever alert for just such services of vindication, and Agni, the god of fire, bears her on his lap to the arms of her husband; and the joyous return to the court is resumed.

Surely this is the end. Again, no. One more bitter renunciation of desire yet awaits the long-tried husband and wife. Whispers are heard that Sita was “no better than she ought to be”; heads are wagged, the *rakshahs* have a way. And Rama must banish her from the court. Years after when they are reunited, her heart is broken and she longs for extinction. The earth opens to receive her, and the story ends. A curious end to a romance of love and adventure, queer and yet consistently Oriental. It is not tragedy, it is not romance as we know romance, it is hardly comedy. It is wisdom, the sage would say, for Rama and Sita to learn the futility of desire. Then why not leave Sita with the demon? Why all these wars and horrors and bloodshed to rescue a wife who is to be renounced when won? The sage would answer: justice is justice. Rama was a king and executor of the will of the gods; if Sita is used and his affection for her to provide a motive, there can be no philosophical objection; but when justice is achieved and the conquest, the reward is not the woman but the consciousness of moral rectitude. So it was in the other poem. When they had achieved justice, the brothers abandoned empire. Poor Sita is a con-

scious pawn in a cosmic game which is not conscious of her fate. Love is only *Maya* with a more potent and hence more dangerous charm.

It is interesting to compare these two great epics with Homer; the result is an interesting appraisal of two quite paradoxical attitudes toward life, both of which we easily recognize in later European tradition. In both the national epic deals with war and generous adventure; both give us poems in which heroes strip for action and display the richness of personal prowess; both set before us ideals of manhood and the motives for living; both are an effort to translate life into action whose worth and meaning can be measured. Curiously also, both have at least one answer in common—disillusionment. The *Iliad* closes on the meaninglessness of the war of personal revenge and glory. Achilles weeping with Priam has learned the hollowness of the thing he had set his heart upon; a hero desires, a hero strives, a hero achieves; and the prize brings only bitterness. This is painfully near the Sanscrit theory of *Maya*. But Achilles for all that does not renounce the world and the active life. Ulysses, too, in the *Odyssey*, in spite of his proud vaunt, "I am Ulysses, son of Laertes, and my fame reaches unto heaven," finds for all his wiles, his adventures, and his success, the same disillusioned restlessness. He, too, must be pricked on to new adventures as an anodyne. Homer sees life only in terms of a man's action, and its worth is the quality of his deeds.

The Oriental feels the same disillusionment, but with him it comes not as a conviction but as a creed, and not as a result of tasting the fruit of action. Or to put it differently, to Homer the active life brings tragedy, the fatal sense of the discrepancy between action and achievement; to the Hindu philosophic calm, for he has long ruminated until life for him has become a philosophic formula. Hence

the Hindu heroes never repine, but calmly throw away kingdoms and lovers, knowing them to be only empty symbols.

This thought is beautifully made plain in the exquisite poem, the *Bhagavat Gita*, the *Lord's Song*, attached to the *Mahabharata*. The scene is as dramatic as one could wish. Arjuna is standing on the eve of the great battle facing the enemy. Beside him is his charioteer, the god Krishna; behind him are his brothers and his allies; in front the enemy, but yet his friends, his cousins, his old teachers, the people with whom he had spent his loving childhood. When he shall give the signal of battle, it will be against these that his celestial bow must be bent and his sword sharp. Ten thousand souls will speed from their stricken bodies, while the forces of deadly hate will mar the souls of slayers and slain. How shall a man who desires righteousness conduct himself at such a crisis? The question is fundamental—how shall a man live without sin and yet perform the manifold duties required of the citizen and soldier, all these things that for their motives go back to desire, the urge of *Maya*? Arjuna throws down his weapon, leaps from his chariot, and exclaims:

“And evil omens threaten me; <sup>1</sup>  
 Krishna, it is not right  
 To look for any blessing, if  
 I kill my kin in fight.

Although they kill me, Krishna, I  
 Have no desire to slay;  
 The earth would not reward me, nor  
 The universe repay.”

The god reads him a whole philosophy of life. “Indifference is called the rule.”

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Ryder's translation of the *Bhagavat Gita* (1929). Reprinted by permission of The University of Chicago Press.



"Who looks alike on foe and friend,  
Pain, pleasure, heat and cold,  
Who levels honor and disgrace,  
Whom no attachments hold,

With equal thought for praise and blame,  
Content with what may be,  
Devout, firm, silent, and unhoused—  
That man is dear to me."

"The learned grieve not for them whose lives are fled nor for them whose lives are not fled."

This is the doctrine again of *Maya* and *Karma*, but with an addition that comes preciously near to perfect Stoicism. These unpleasant duties must be performed, but man must attach no value nor desire to them; neither loving them nor hating he must take his station as a man in this world. More difficult are those things a man loves, a mistress, children, friends, but to these there must be no soul's attachment, for they too are unreal. Even life itself is an unreal phantasmagoria with birth and rebirth like the blending pictures on a screen, which when the lantern ceases leave the screen as though they had not been. Life must be thus lived by the man of understanding as though it were a no life, for of precisely this empty texture is all this complex of desire and *Maya*. The wisest man, the sage, can renounce utterly and live the life of the hermit. The man of the world can perform his duties, in the front-line trenches in daily peril, and yet also achieve salvation.

In this open-eyed disillusionment, without bitterness or anguish, there can be no tragedy. Tragedy is only for those who cling to desire, who feel the rancour of a life cast on the rocks of disaster, or the futility of an action compassed that brings no satisfaction, and who cling with passionate insistence to the first value of personality.

"When man reflects on things of sense,  
 Attachments to them move  
 His spirit; love thus comes to birth;  
 And wrath is born of love.

For when the mind of man becomes  
 His gadding senses' slave,  
 It buffets wisdom, as the wind  
 A ship upon the wave."

"Senses' slave", yes; but to such alone comes the experience of tragedy. Hence the Sanscrit epics end with gentle renunciation instead of tragedy or romantic love. The heroes are victorious and resigned, gain their purposes but are never exultant, learn disillusionment but do not weep. They are captains of their souls because they know the meaninglessness of captaincy and the vanity of the single human soul. Defeat and victory seen from infinity are as one; all differences disappear when measured by the rod of eternity; why therefore be exultant and wherein lies the pain of defeat? The Hindu hero attains wisdom.

This is the philosophy of the world-weary and defeated in the struggle, is it not? It is an effort, and a beautiful one, to raise the eyes beyond the narrow confines of life to the blessed vision beyond and peace. But is it peace gained through a spiritual contest, or a fleeing the battle? In belittling this world and the value of human life, does not something precious escape that the old Greek dramatist and poet would regard as the essence of humanity? The more active life may disclose tragedy, but does not the fierce experience and assertion of tragedy imply not a lessened but a vindicated personality? If "indifference" is the "rule", may it not also be a denial of human nature and a motive for escape from the problem of living? Is

not the tragedy that is the history of India, conquered and reconquered, and yet steadfast to its tradition, the story of this effort at escape? These are inescapable questions.

Consistent to his creed, the Hindu poet draws his picture of human life attempting to reduce it to the simplicity of its lowest terms. For as a corollary to his philosophy comes the doctrine that only in the escape from complexity lies the way to truth. This rule is as inflexible in these epics as in Mr. Gandhi's renunciation of western civilization to-day. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal." The escape is to the simple life. Hence the large reward ever held forth to those who leave cities and dwell as hermits in the wilderness; and the charm of the small routine of the life according to nature. Long before Rousseau said his adieu to Paris and retired to the Hermitage, centuries before Wordsworth discovered that in his Westmoreland hills among shepherds and simple folk he could find peace, long before the Middle Ages when Saint Bernard blessed the Clara Vallis with his presence, the Hindu learned the peace that comes far from the haunts of men.

With this love of solitude "where none intrudes" there is the mystical love of nature. This rapt exaltation in the presence of the interminable forest, the majesty of the mountains, the broad expanse of river; this communion with nature, when man and nature are pervaded by the same spirit of the cosmic universe; this is something we shall not find in Europe until the poets of the Romantic movement, like Wordsworth, have taught us to look with other eyes. To the Greek, nature was at odds with the life of man, and it is only in some of his later poetry, like Theocritus', that the scene shifts from the city and the ways of man, to

the country. But even here it is a country subject to man. So it is, except for a rapt moment of vision to Virgil. The Indian landscape with its mystery never for a moment loses its hold on the imagination of the poet. The majestic peace and the impenetrable fastnesses of the Himalayas with their calm snow-capped peaks, never the same yet enduring forever—a symbol of eternity, the abode of the gods; the dense forests reaching endlessly beyond the fringe of city and village; the great rivers, and above all the sacred Ganges, the bringer of life to a thirsty land. It is into this nature that the poet is ever releasing the tired spirits of his characters, that there they may discover peace and wisdom.

The plot of the story likewise is always simple. A conflict of motives enters into the texture of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. In Greek tragedy and comedy the motives become yet more difficult in pattern. But here the story swings on an easy pivot—the doctrine of *Karma*, a new version of the idea of Fate. The action in the stories is always a retribution, due to the hero's own ignorance or blind desire or that of some person near to him. Rama's exile, the enmity of Ravana, the renunciation of Sita,—for the clue to these situations one must look, not to Rama's character, but to some deed somewhere, which will show man's life as it were in a ledger where there is a pat correspondence between fault incurred and penalty paid. This fact becomes even more singular as one reads the Indian drama, where the poet sits in judgment, as it were, with a delicate pair of scales in his hand.

Of all the motives for human conduct the most nearly universal is that of love, and the most dangerous. Hence it becomes the chief theme with the Indian poet. How curiously Homer puts this in its place in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with the other human desires. Here, however,

it is exalted and nearly always given first place. The most exquisite stories in the *Mahabharata* are the well-known little episodes of Nala and Damayanti or the pathetic loyalty of Princess Savitri. The royal yet rash king, Nala, who weds the beautiful Damayanti, and then in a fit of gambling rage stakes and loses everything. His wife bravely clings to him, but in his despair he abandons her in the wilderness. Then how gradually he is restored to his right mind and at last to her arms. The gentle Savitri who loved and chose her man in spite of the oracle that he could live but one short year. Then how she pursued Death, winning from his jealous ill-will the boon of her husband's life. This love is the Indian *Kama*, a motive for life that must also be known aright, lest in the desire for love man and woman lose wisdom. The epic hero must love wisely and not too well, knowing that *Kama* is the most alluring mystery of *Maya*.

But above all the Indian poet simplifies his characters; and here the contrast between India and Greece becomes notable. The Indian epical characters are all types. The poet is thinking in terms also of political and priestly institutions, and his characters are allegories of virtues and vices. Homer's characters are personalities, greater than the average, no doubt, but flawed with human imperfections; he is nowhere striving to achieve a picture of an ideal hero, but to exhibit in his rich complexity a man. But Rama is a prince first, a divine prince without flaw and without reproach. So are all ideal characters—Arjuna, the gallant warrior; Krishna, the god incarnate; Bhima, the man of strength. Their acts are always in character. The villains likewise are incarnated vices, Duryodhana the unwise tyrant; Ravana, the heroic demon.

So are the women, models of housewifely virtues like the

mothers of Rama and the Pandavas; or of wifely devotion like Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; or expensive luxuries like the young mother of Prince Bharata. Homer can with a sketch give us the richer complexity of a Helen, an Andromache, or the mystery of a Calypso. But to the Indian these freer motives in a woman's life are absent. Though early India assigned a larger place to woman than she finds there to-day, and though she retained a larger dignity, the Indian epic heroine lives a restricted life, and is already on the way to seclusion. Like the Indian epic hero, she is not a personality but an edification for the reader, a memento to learn to do likewise. Poetry in this again becomes the handmaid of philosophy.

In the Greek epic the supernatural is a borrowed ornament, in the Hindu it is, if not the first, at least the second motive. And this is as it should be, for in India the difference between the natural and supernatural is always on the point of disappearing. Homer's heroes are divine only by courtesy, and sometimes by descent, but never in their character; Indian heroes are never quite human, even when they are farthest from the gods. Homer's gods are always exaggerated human beings possessing only the gift of irresponsible immortality; the Hindu gods are monstrously unhuman, and yet never immortal. In the scale of existence they are one degree superior to man, but are also creatures of *Maya*, and caravanserais for the soul's progress to *Nirvana*. A human being by proper practice may render himself independent of them or even superior to them; but they are ever also an aid to righteousness, and a means for ultimate salvation to those whose faith and works are weak. "They who worship the gods come to the gods; they who worship Me lift themselves to Me."

The gods are necessary to the poems, because the poems

have a significance beyond the time and place of their action; as has every human act, bound up as it is in the chain of *Karma*; and they play a potent rôle in the poems. It is Krishna, the *avatar* or incarnation of Krishna, who is the constant companion of Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*; it is through him that the hero receives his celestial arms. In the *Ramayana* again it is the god Vishnu that is the hero. Ravana, the demon of the southern wilderness, is the villain. Indra and Agni, the gods of the sky and of fire, come when needed and discharge their appropriate functions. The monkey god, Huniman, is Rama's chief of staff and constant friend. The poem is as redolent of the supernatural as Homer's *Iliad* is of the downright human. Yet with all this, one does not feel that the gods here are as convincing as the good-natured Olympians who flutter on the grandstand as the fatal game is played to its tragic close beneath the walls of Troy.

It is only at moments when the poet's philosophy breaks down at a scene of poignant grief that his supernatural becomes convincing. I am thinking now of the desolate father, Ravana, as he bends above the lifeless form of his son, Indrajit, slain in his father's place. The pain then in the heart of this distressed *Rakshah* is as genuinely human as the lament of the forlorn Sita.

"Full of years,—so oft I pondered,—when the monarch Ravan dies,  
Indrajit shall watch his bedside, Indrajit shall close his eyes,

But the course of nature changes, and the father weeps the son,  
Youth is fallen, and the aged lives to fight the foe alone!"

The gods thus are exalted spiritual functions, not personalities. Their duties absorb their time, and among these the lot of humanity plays the chiefest part. But in them-

selves they are so exceedingly above the cares of poor mortals that the mortal imagination may not compass them. Only the rare mortal who acquires wisdom, and thus transcends the illusion that is mortality, may transcend even divinity and attain *Nirvana*.

In bringing this chapter to a close it would never do to leave unsaid a word about the Sanscrit drama. In its origins possibly borrowed from the Greeks, it ran an independent and interesting existence for centuries, until there grew up a dramatic literature whose significance Europe and America only lately have come to recognize. The *Little Clay Cart* was played in this country only a few years ago. It is a gem, possibly the finest gem of the whole collection; but the least representative of the dramatic genius of India. Let me speak rather of Kalidasa and the *Çakuntala*.

"Would'st thou the bloom of spring time,  
The fruit of the mellowing year,  
Would'st thou all charms and sweetness,  
Would'st thou all profit and nurture,  
Would'st thou all heavenly and earthly,  
In one rich name encompass  
Name I thee, *Çakuntala*, only,  
And naught else need be said."

So runs Goethe's famous vindication of the charm of the lyric drama. It is not greatly exaggerated. Kalidasa is the most famous dramatic poet. Curiously, he lived in India when literature in Europe was in its thousand years of sleep.

There is a pastoral charm about the *Çakuntala*, something like the unreality of the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*. In Shakespeare's comedy, however, you do touch life and know its unpleasantness. Even over the magic forest there



spreads for a moment a cloud of danger; and characters like Touchstone and Jacques can come to maturity only in a world of real shadows. But in the *Çakuntala* everything except *Kama* is as unreal as a fairy story, and as charming, and this is its charm.

The story is one of the many that lie hidden in the recesses of the *Mahabharata*. King Dushyanta with a retinue is out hunting; and in the forest meets Çakuntala, the foster daughter of a hermit. They fall in love, as all should, on first sight, are married, and he leaves for his capital with the promise that he will send a fitting embassy to escort her to the palace. She is so lost in an ocean of blissful memories that she fails to hear the call of an irascible holy man and incurs a curse—holy men in India can be very impatient, it is the wrath of the righteous like that of a prophet—that her husband will not recognize her until he sees the ring he has given her.

And so it turns out. The king forgets to send for her, and she, about to become a mother, journeys uninvited to the court only to be sent away politely but finally. She cannot produce the ring. Who is this adventuress, anyway, striving to convict the king of looseness in his amours? As she turns to leave a miracle happens; her mother, a heavenly nymph, comes in a blaze of light and carries her to her celestial home.

But the king is melancholy. Some hidden sorrow gnaws at his heart, which is only revealed to him when some fishermen bring in a fish that in its gullet has the royal ring—once given to Çakuntala. The story ends as it should, of course, with the royal lovers united now after this long separation, during which both have learned the true way of love, and also wisdom. The poem closes with the pious wish:

"May kingship benefit the land,  
 And wisdom grow in scholar's band;  
 May Shiva see my faith on earth  
 And make me free of all rebirth."

Except that this poem is given us in the form of a drama, there is no difference between it and the poetic stories in the epics. It suggests the plot of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, but its motives never quite make us feel the seriousness of the heroine's situation; and Dushyanta is a very different character from Leontes. But it has a lyric character that Shakespeare would have enjoyed, the lyrical motive that breaks out in *The Tempest* as earlier in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*—lyric comedy in a world where danger is only a painted curtain, and the course of true love always runs smoothly to wisdom.

And this is what I want to close with. The attitude of the Indian poet, no matter what his theme, epic or dramatic, is nearly always that of lyrical comedy. Life is serious only because of *Maya*, illusion, and its situations which seem without hope are only dream scenery which the truly wise, like Prospero, can see for what it is:

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
 Are melted into air, into thin air:  
 And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
 The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
 As dreams are made on, and our little life  
 Is rounded with a sleep."

In such a world a wise man is beyond good and evil.



## VIII. THE VOICE FROM THE WILDERNESS

### I. THE HEBREW BIBLE

"For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity . . ."  
"Though he slay me yet will I trust him."

Who has not thrilled before the mystery of the desert? The unheeding vastness of the horizon of sand and sky, the pitiless anger of the sun, the terror of the storm, the soft coolness or the bitter chill of the night, the myriad sparkle of the stars, the downright simplicity, the remorselessness and man's scant protection against it, the shadow of a rock in a weary land or the miracle of a spring of flowing water. These things breed a people whose imaginations will be as downright as the landscape. From these hidden springs will come ideas as startling as the roving desert tribes, and as potent. For many centuries the history of the world told the story of the pressure of these restless folk upon the centers of culture. Egypt knew it, Babylonia was never without it, Greece and even Rome were to feel it, and the rise of Islam was its near conquest of the world. Judaism and Islam were among its gifts to the world; both desert born and bred, and having in them the imaginative fervor and downrightness of the Bedouin poet.

Who were the Hebrews, the descendants of the patri-

archs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if we follow the old tradition as it is set forth in the chapters of *Genesis*? Whatever the historical accuracy of these stories—and we may not dismiss them with a gesture—they do tell us one supremely significant fact—the early Hebrew prided himself upon his desert origin and early mode of life. He was a Bedouin who could not forget the aristocracy of the desert nomad. For the city-dweller and people devoted to peaceful arts and commerce, he felt a fine contempt. Towns for him were magazines where booty was stored, where slaves could be captured, and where insidious dangers and immoralities abounded; he was for the uplands and hills and his treasure was his camels and sheep. He dwelt on the fringes of civilization, capturing with his bow such comforts and culture as he cared to use; for the rest, he called it luxury and idolatry, as does his brother to-day on the plains of Arabia.

But by a fortunate series of accidents, he was forced against the great trade route between Babylonia and Egypt, that runs through Palestine, and thus in contact with old and settled cultures. To the south was Egypt; nearer along the sea coast was Philistia, inhabited it may be by the exiles from Mycenaean Greece; further north were the Canaanites in the fertile valleys of Samaria, and beyond Phoenicia and Syria with the ancient city of Damascus. These were rich and valuable but ever alert and dangerous neighbors. To the east, pressing in from the desert, were other Bedouin tribes, hungry for the opportunity of a fling at the rich cities and agriculture, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the other desert dwellers beyond Jordan. It was a fortunate site, these children of Israel chose, but one of deadly danger; for they must be strong to hold their position; and as the wars between Egypt and Babylonia

were not infrequent, the Hebrew early learned the misery of a small buffer state between powerful rivals. Palestine was the Belgium of the Near East.

But the Hebrew was granted one short but brilliant period of national greatness—something his imagination never allowed him to forget. During a period of exhaustion of Egypt and Babylonia, there occurred the brilliant reigns of David and Solomon, and little Israel had its one experience of empire. David captured and strengthened the hill fortress of Jerusalem—a strategic move—an impregnable retreat in a place almost inaccessible to the invader. Jerusalem prospered and was adorned like an oriental city with temple and palace; and gradually the Hebrew aristocracy became reconciled to urban life and luxury. From a pastoral people an ever larger number became fixed on the soil as farmers or went into cities and set in motion new industries. It was these political and economic changes that became the motives for much of the best in Hebrew literature.

For the conscience of the Hebrew never forgot the simplicity of his desert origin, and his personal loyalty to the Hebrew Yahweh. Kings and a landed aristocracy and the luxury of a settled life, and the new impact of the surrounding paganism were ever felt to be a stain on the original purity of the desert manners. Luxury was always synonymous with sin, and the bitterest charge of the poet is hurled at those whom the Greek would have found wholly seductive.

“Moreover the Lord said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet; therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away

the bravery of their anklets, and the cauls, and the crescents; the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers; the headties, and the ankle chains, and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the rings, and the nose jewels; the festival robes, and the mantles, and the shawls, and the satchels; the hand mirrors, and the fine linen, and the turbans, and the veils."

Their finest poetry is always inspired, not by the ways of man, but by the majesty of nature and its mystery—the desert.

"The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament sheweth his handywork.  
Day unto day uttereth speech,  
And night unto night sheweth knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language;  
Their voice cannot be heard.  
Their line is gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world."

Or from its burning heat the poet's imagination turns for comfort to the oasis and the running brook.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul."

Is it to be wondered at that the favorite king David is ever referred to as the shepherd king, and his greatest exploits those he performed while he was yet a desert bandit?

The Hebrew Bible is not a book; it is a library selected from the best Hebrew literature, prose and poetry, and covers a period from about 900 to about 500 years before Christ. But when we set it beside the Greek we notice some strange discrepancies. There is no drama, though there is a great deal in Hebrew history that might well have stirred the imagination of a dramatic poet. There is no philosophy like Plato's or Aristotle's, though there are

books of wisdom, like the *Proverbs*, and a book of anxious questioning in *Job*. For the very intensity of the Hebrew conflict between the calls of a richer civic life and the old claims of Bedouin independence, the transcendent quality of the religion that later became a fierce glow of orthodoxy, and the political disturbances, all these drove the imagination, as it were, underground, to explore the intensity of its own emotional responses. As a religious book the Bible, or nearly all of it, is vividly Yahweh conscious. Homer, too, is conscious of the Olympians, but in a totally different manner. And this large difference, something that gives an entirely new view of the fate of man, has also most profoundly entered into the very heart of later European thought.

Who were the chief poets? Few literatures in so brief a space are graced with a larger heritage of great poetry. We call to mind the unknown singers of the psalms, not of the liturgical hymns fashioned to lend a charm to the temple worship, but of the lyrics of adoration that comforted the lone singers, when perhaps like David, they held nightly converse with the stars or bowed before the terror of the tempest.

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters:  
The God of glory thundereth,  
Even the Lord upon many waters.  
The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.  
The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;"

Or the singer exultantly proclaims his trust in his God of righteousness:

"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;  
My God, my strong rock, in him will I trust."

In consequence there is a moral and emotional intensity in Hebrew poetry, and a lyric quality that we do not discover in other literatures. We catch this deeply personal note in the early lament of David over Saul and Jonathan:

“Weep, O Judah,  
Grieve, O Israel,  
On thy heights are slain,  
How are the mighty fallen.

Tell it not in Gath,  
Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;  
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,  
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.  
Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you,  
Neither fields of offerings:  
For there the shield of the mighty was vilely cast away,  
The shield of Saul, as of one not anointed with oil.”

But the greatest poets were found among the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Joel. City bred and aristocratic, perhaps, as Isaiah and Amos, or men of the desert like Joel; but all men who had turned their backs upon the refinements of life and had embraced the calling of inspired poet with a mission. They were men who lived in an age when the danger to the country was acute. As statesmen they could foresee the march of the invader, and their voices are raised in bitter scorn or anxious protest, in fiery anger or pathetic lament; but always in the cry to return to the old simplicity of life and religion. Always it is the desert calling on the city to mend its manners, lest the new luxury sap the manhood and the new religion make them forget their austere Yahweh. In their eager vision already they see the invader and their country in ruin:

“They leap upon the city;  
They run upon the wall;



They climb up into the houses;  
They enter in at the windows like a thief.  
The earth quaketh before them;  
The heavens tremble;  
The sun and the moon are darkened,  
And the stars withdraw their shining."

Prophet, poet, the words are almost interchangeable. Their kind may yet be seen, sadly degenerate perhaps, in the *mullahs* of many an Arab tribe. And their history in Palestine is an interesting comment on the changing traditions of the Hebrew people. They did at times foretell the future, but this was by no means their chief function. Rather they were inspired voices that 'spoke out' in the name of Yahweh. Here is the account of Isaiah's calling:

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts!  
The fulness of the whole earth is his glory!

And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I:

Woe is me, for I am undone:  
Because I am a man of unclean lips,  
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.  
For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts:

Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said:

Lo, this hath touched thy lips;  
And thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me."

In the temple while worshipping he had seen a vision, and felt himself urged to set forth the Lord's will. Inspired poet, and his utterance is the finest poetry.

We find these prophets in the earliest days of Hebrew history. Moses was the prophet law-giver, a mythical figure of supernal grandeur. Samuel was one of the greatest, and guided the destiny of the people at a most critical time. With the statesman's desire to unite the scattered tribes, he gave them a soldier-king, Saul; then when Saul proved unmanageable, he played against him the more diplomatic soldier-poet, David. Samuel, the Kingmaker, none of his words survive, but we can catch the indomitable courage of the man, his waywardness, his strange appearance, and his stranger manners. He was no city-dweller or creature of luxury. He combined the offices of "seer" and statesman, welding together a nomadic people and examining the entrails of sacrifices to pronounce the omens. They ever have the courage of their convictions, these men, and can beard the most potent of princes: Nathan, telling the proud King David that he has sinned with the murdered Uriah's wife; Elijah, coming boldly out of the wilderness to tell King Ahab that the royal house has brought wickedness to Israel. They can be as dramatic in their action. I would give much for the song of exultation sung by this "hairy prophet", Elijah, as after the divine vindication, he took up the sword, and alone fell upon the four hundred discomfited prophets of Baal. They had deserved their death at the hands of one lone man armed with the wrath of his "jealous" god.

Later they become the poets of the prophetic books of

the Scriptures. But their books were not composed in any modern manner. Retiring into the wilderness, like John the Baptist or Jesus later, they would ponder on the inscrutable; then with the clearness of a vision would come the message. It would take the form of a chant, a hymn of advice or condemnation, and the prophet would travel "speaking out" the words that were in him. It was not he speaking but the Lord, and his "Thus saith the Lord" would be heard from throne room and council chamber to market place and temple, wherever men congregated. These are the hymns or sermons that later were gathered into the books, and left for our edification. But to read them aright one must feel the call of the desert.

There is nothing quite like the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible in any literature. One might put them beside the *Philippics* of Demosthenes (they have at times much the same patriotic motive of enlisting the emotions of their country-men against the invader); but Demosthenes is oratorical prose, these the intense personal imagery of poetry and vision. One might compare them with the moral enthusiasm of Socrates' *Apology*, but here again is the intense personal emotion of the poetical reformer that discards the appurtenances of logic and persuasion. They are statesmen, urging the immediate political and moral rehabilitation of the country in the face of a crisis; they are social reformers, urging justice to the widows and fatherless and brotherhood to the poor; they are jealous ministers in the service of their God, proclaiming against the new practices of paganism and luxury; they are the consolers of the people in the day of affliction; they are the inspired prophets painting the future of the rejuvenated race and the age of gold that shall dawn with the coming of the Messiah. All these they were and more in these scat-

tered collections of poetic outbursts that we prosaically label the *Major* and *Minor Prophets*.

They are early and late deeply conscious of the meaning of sin and punishment, and can be read intelligently only in connection with the history of their times, and are a moral comment on the events they celebrate. Their theme is the historical significance of a nation's misdeeds or righteousness, and the watchful eye of a Yahweh who weighs iniquity and dispenses justice. Never popular, for their voice was always lifted against the wind of public opinion, sometimes they seem even unpatriotic or traitorous; many were put to shameful death, and the whole life of Jeremiah is a tragedy of loneliness, which breaks out more than once into passionate grief:

"Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontide; because he slew not me from the womb."

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah lived during troublous times. The prophecies of both cover a long period of years and have to do with a large variety of immediate problems of the little state of Judea. But the central theme of Isaiah is the Assyrian invasion of Sennacherib (701 B.C.) in the reign of the good king Hezekiah. Fortunately the state was spared the last indignity this time, and Isaiah's patriotic pleas came in season:

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil: learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson,

they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

But for Jeremiah the event was to have a different ending. It is now the Babylonian conqueror that he sees before the gate of the city and the year is 597, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people carried into exile. As a statesman he sees the inevitable tragedy of his country and the futile confidence of king and army. Only wickedness and pride has brought things to this pass; but even now something may be saved, if only those in authority will bow to the inevitable:

"Thus saith the Lord: Execute ye judgement and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation."

Isaiah is the sincerest of nationalists, seeing in the Hebrew the chosen people, with a mission of righteousness that must be made manifest to the nations. In the second half of the book, the Second Isaiah, a prophet who lived perhaps two hundred years later, in the days after the Exile, saw most clearly what this mission might be and its significance to humanity. In these chapters are the Messianic prophecies, breathing an ideal spiritual patriotism such as Hebrew literature had never seen before, and no literature was ever quite to grasp again. It is a picture of a king, like David, who should come to restore his people and to bring again the age of gold:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him  
 That bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace,  
 That bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation:  
 That saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

Jeremiah, on the other hand, is what to-day might be called an internationalist. He lacks the vision of the Second Isaiah, but has the hard political sense of a Roman Emperor. Defeat, exile, had broken his people; they are no longer a nation, but the discipline of their moral ideals, the enthusiasm of their faith, can have a meaning now for the whole world, and with passionate intensity he speaks to his stunned compatriots. The few that have escaped the hand of the Babylonian are fleeing for Egypt, carrying with them for their safety the prophet. These are his last words, for he died in the desert, as a Hebrew prophet should die, and a witness to the Hebrew Yahweh. These are his last words:

"Ye that have escaped the sword,  
 Go ye, stand not still;  
 Remember the Lord from afar,  
 And let Jerusalem come into your mind."

This same moral intensity has affected the prose of the Hebrew Bible and given it a tone and a rhythmic structure almost unique in ancient literature. The early history of the world, the story of the patriarchs, the vivid narrative of the sojourn in Egypt, and the wanderings in the wilderness, the snap-shots of the judges, the long account of the founding of the Hebrew monarchy—all these things that in history as it is ordinarily written are dry matter-of-fact chronicles, in the books of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Judges*, and *Samuel* are as potent in their emotional appeal as the cantos of an epic. They are epic material, fused with the emo-

tional life of the unknown prophet-historians, and held up to us as an example of the way things go in the world of Yahweh and his chosen people. They are not prose history, but history striving to be poetry and even drama. The spirit of the prophet permeates even these, and they are living examples in prose to reënforce the moral of his song. Let the people hear the deeds of the Lord and tremble before his might.

Abraham, the man of destiny, the friend of the Lord, the chosen ancestor of a people who were to be as the sand of the desert, without number, was no hero such as we meet in the Greek myth, but a symbol, like Aeneas, of obedience to a high destiny. But it is not obedience in which sense of personality is lost, rather personality is gained. He is instant in prayer and sacrifice; but except on one occasion, the sacrifice of his son Isaac, his personal interest is never frustrated by his high calling. He is never anything more than a glorified Sheikh whom fortune in trade or in war never fails. He is an attractive figure, with his wife and son and his flocks and herds, content to sit in the door of his tent, and favored by casual visits from the Most High. He was obedient.

His grandson Jacob was somewhat more temperamental—a poet perhaps—for he had strange visions, as well as kaleidoscopic adventures. Now a wanderer from home out of jealousy and fear of his brother, now a lover wooing his mistress and serving a fourteen-year apprenticeship for her hand. He was not above sharp practice—in the name of Yahweh—and prospered in double-dealing, for he, too, was obedient. It must have strained the rigid code of Hebrew ethics to admit Jacob among the worthy patriarchs, but he never suffered more than a temporary lapse from the steadfast family fortune. This comes to full flower in

the marvelous story of his son Joseph who leaves the desert a slave to become master of all Egypt.

Even the popular hero tale of the strong man Samson has been tinged with the same moral. Marked in his youth by a vow, he becomes a local leader of his people against the crushing tyranny of the city-dwelling Philistines. He is no Homeric hero armed with lance and buckler, but a two-fisted fighter whose hands prevail over the swords of his enemies. He is carried by the strength of his vow from achievement to achievement. Lions, Philistines, the gates of walled cities are all one to him. He even employs the beasts of the wilderness to carry out his revenge, and tying firebrands to the tails of foxes, burns down the enemies' standing corn. A whimsical character, this, almost broadly Celtic in his love of the unexpected and grotesque. He has only one weakness, the light-hearted ladies of the Philistines; but his conquest by them is not the cause of his undoing; rather from it he rises to new feats. It is not until his vow is broken and he is convicted of disobedience that his strength and fortune fail. Again we have history with a moral; an interpretation of a legend in the light of theological dogma.

But the supreme example of this theological rendering of history is the tragic story of Saul. A Greek dramatist would have found in this the motive of a tragedy as poignant as that of Oedipus or Agamemnon; but the Hebrew imagination can see in it only a moral tale that might be set down in a textbook for the childish mind. The success of the theologian is the death of tragedy—or of comedy.

Saul the young man of promise, taller by a head than his fellows, a soldier, but so modest that on his coronation day the prophet has to drag him from his hiding place in the camp baggage—this is the man the keen politician Samuel



has chosen to be the new king of Israel. It is a time of danger. The Philistines had overcome the Hebrews and planted garrisons among the hills to keep the restless tribes in subjection. But Saul is a youth that inspires confidence, and his first exploit across the Jordan against the raiding Bedouins is hugely successful. Again and again he strikes with his devoted tribesmen, holding the Philistines in check, defeating them in a fair engagement, dashing south to the Dead Sea to meet another desert thrust. But with success his head is turned; he antagonizes the prophet, is disobedient, is cursed with insanity and maddened by jealousy of his young rival David, until finally after thirty years of glory and despair, he and his devoted son Jonathan are slain by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa.

For sheer narrative skill, for tense rising interest, for delicate episode after episode, for dramatic personality in the grip of conflicting emotions, there is everything here for a great epic poem. There are motives that would have made Homer's heart glad: the rival characters David and Saul; the young poet-soldier, graceful and yet a mighty man of arms, a favorite with all classes after his magnificent defeat of the giant Philistine; his friendship to the death with Jonathan, whose "love to him was sweeter than the love of woman". Yet David knew also to the last the sweetness of woman—Michal, a proud princess and daughter of Saul; Abigail, the wife of a rich Sheikh, who ransomed her husband by her love for the young bandit fleeing from Saul. Against this manifold romantic youth, there is the sombre figure of the king, a man of arms and royal deeds, morose and resentful now in his age, forsaken by the prophet, but keeping the loyalty of his soldiers to the last. King Mark and young Tristram? Not quite. David is finer than Tristram, and Saul far nobler than

Mark; and there is no Isolde to come between them. Their own natures are rivalry enough, and a crown is the pledge of victory.

All this the Hebrew poet-historian had, and he threw it all away. Saul is fated, doomed, because he failed in his obedience. He had been commanded to root out Amalek, man and beast; but he had saved the king and some choice cattle.

"Though thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed thee king over Israel; and the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst that which was evil in the sight of the Lord?"

"Didst evil in the sight of the Lord"—how often is this phrase to be repeated in Hebrew history?

This is a code of ethics as downright as it is all external—a series of commands as obvious as the ten commandments. Saul had offended Yahweh, and the deity had turned away his face from the king. The victory of the Philistines was the payment exacted by the god's righteous anger. So the Hebrew read history. So he read the mournful chapters of his own history. The pagan Babylonian and Assyrian led Judah and Israel captive that the word of Yahweh might be made manifest to the nations; and the servants of Yahweh must serve the worshippers of Baal and strange gods because they have been lax in their obedience. There is irony here that the downright orthodox conscience of Judaism never suspected. Homer's Olympians, though they may lack dignity, are never ironically unintelligent.

But there are moments when the conscience of the his-

torian is thrilled by the victory of righteousness. For sheer narrative power again there is little to be compared with the story of Elijah. Outraged by the contumacy of the wicked wife of the Israelitish king Ahab, Jezebel, the servant of Baal, the prophet had summoned the vacillating king and all Israel to a contest between Yahweh and Baal. "If Baal be god serve him, if Yahweh be god serve him." The four hundred prophets of Baal were assembled, and against them was the lone prophet of the Lord. Both built altars, slew bullocks, piled them on the altars, and called upon their gods. The one who would send down fire from Heaven, he was to be the God of Hosts. The miracle was an incredible one, but convincingly dramatic.

"Then the fire of Yahweh fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Yahweh, he is God; Yahweh, he is God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."

These manifestations of divine power, and the thrill of the narrative carry conviction. After this read the exultant paragraphs telling of the death of the wicked queen, Jezebel. So hideously has she been painted that it is only in our day that history has made the attempt to do justice to her undoubted genius. But she represented the vice of cities and the luxury of the new order that was slowly but surely undermining the old desert austerity. It is the desert exulting over the spoliation of the unclean.

"And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and tired her head, and looked out of the window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Is it peace, thou Zimri, thy master's murderer? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said,

Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot."

This simple faith of the Hebrew was not to go unchallenged by later Hebrew thought. So long as he was in contact with Babylonia, Assyria, or Egypt his ultimate trust in his God remained unshaken; for though he might ape the stronger peoples and build a "high place" for the conquering god Baal, in his heart he acknowledged Yahweh and his sacrifices were uninterrupted. But after the fourth century and the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Hebrew consciousness had a far wider horizon than the hills of Palestine. In the sixth and seventh centuries already changes had taken place that were no less than a cataclysm. The two little Hebrew states had been overrun and conquered by the Assyrian and the Babylonian; the leading families had been transported to other lands; and already the Hebrew had begun the international existence which has characterized him ever since. With Alexander and the new Greek empires, which were to persist until Rome swept the whole world into one family, the hope of an independent Hebrew state gradually began to fade in spite even of the heroic effort of the Maccabees. The Jew, now, of the Diaspora—for the Israelites of the northern kingdom gradually disappeared—melted into that loose amalgamation of Syrians, Levantines, Greeks, that is as hard to describe as it was impossible to unite politically, as much at home in Alexandria or Athens as he had been in Jerusalem, and though he rigidly kept the name of his ancestors, his curiosity was awakened by a science, philosophy, and culture that he had never dreamed of in his youth.

It was during this age, trying to the orthodox Hebrew

theologian, that the book of *Daniel* was written. It is a most amazing story, unique of its kind, and to us in these later years as productive of mare's nests and theological vertigo as anything the ingenuity of the human imagination has ever produced. It purports to be prophecy, but it is in truth only propaganda; it pretends to historical accuracy, but it is as full of romantic myth as the Indian epics. It asserts that it deals with events that occurred in the sixth century before Christ and that it foretells the story of the next centuries; but it was written in the second after these centuries had passed, and the most important event of all to the Jew, the temporary success of the Maccabees, it fails to mention. As a prophet, the author might have done better. Historically the book belongs to the class of the story of Queen Esther, orthodox Jewish propaganda with a shocking disregard of historical fact. But as a revelation of the Hebrew temper, the book is without peer.

The younger generation of Jews were being corrupted by the new Greek culture and were neglecting the austere ways of their fathers. Yahweh was being forgotten in the newer and more attractive cults of the less ethically rigid deities of Greece and the Orient. One cannot but sympathize with the censoriousness of the orthodox Hebrew conscience; for the new cults were far from pretty and their ways were a turning of the back on most of the Commandments and all the moral rigor of the desert ethics. Strewing flowers over the Aphrodite and Priapus obscenities made matters only worse to the prophet, and he raised his voice in violent protest as he held his nose. But here in this book we have a way of approach far more tactful and morally convincing.

The book is the story of the prophet Daniel, who likewise had been brought into contact with the luxury of a

culture that knew not Yahweh. More than this, he had been selected by no less a person than the great emperor, Nebuchadnezzar himself—a name to conjure with—to be an intimate of the palace and companion of the king. Here if anywhere youth and attractiveness would be in jeopardy, and Daniel had both; but he had also an understanding and a will not to be shaken even by the most seductive of temptations. He began by refusing the luxury of the court diet, preferring in its place the simplicity of the desert. His companions refused to fall down before the golden image, which the whole world was brought together to adore, and for this contumacy were thrown into the fiery furnace heated seven times. But an angel came down and the trio came forth unharmed.

So Daniel goes from adventure to adventure, reading dreams that the king has forgotten, guiding the emperor in perilous crises, rigidly adhering to the truth and to his faith, and turning each occasion for disaster into a means to advance himself in the royal favor. Even the lion's den has for him no terrors, and he comes forth to become the chief courtier and adviser and the trusted friend of the emperor. Thus Yahweh wrought for Daniel in perilous ways when Daniel kept the faith. If the new generation of Jews will only act on his example, Yahweh may yet be counted on to keep faith with his people. So runs the obvious argument in the writer's mind. And the discomfiture of the enemies of Daniel will be the discomfiture also of the new Hellenizing enemy who would overturn God's commandments and set at nought the way of the righteous. This was the theme of the old prophet. It is the new theme also of the psalmist, only in the psalm it is turned from the larger issues of the nation to the life of the individual.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 Nor standeth in the way of sinners,  
 Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.  
 But his delight is in the law of the Lord;  
 And in his law doth he meditate day and night."

In *Daniel* we have the downright reassertion of the Hebrew orthodox creed, written in the century that preceded the birth of Christ; in *Job* we have the struggle of a Jew who cannot throw over the faith of his fathers, and yet also cannot deny the worth of the new Greek philosophy. The book as we have it has undergone strange vicissitudes. It was at first a simple folk-tale, like the story of Ruth, with its scene laid somewhere in Arabia. Then its possibilities were noted by a Hellenized Jew, perhaps of Alexandria, who partly on the model of a Socratic dialogue, partly on that of a Greek tragedy, wrote the long dialogue between Job and his friends. Later other chapters were added and another character, Elihu; and the nature hymns were put at the close in the manner of the chorus to a Greek tragedy. Finally there were a multitude of interpolations and corrections due to the tampering of orthodox hands that resented the bold spirit of inquiry of the poet who dared challenge the faith in Yahweh. The result is a most difficult book for the textual critic, but at the same time one of the sublime poems in the world's literature.<sup>1</sup>

The original folk-tale is as simple and satisfactory as one might wish—like the German *Märchen*. Job was a most

<sup>1</sup> I have here followed the theory of *Job* roughly as outlined by the *International Critical Commentary*, though I fear I have rather leaned a little to the left in allowing the mutilation of the text by the orthodox who piously strove to soften Job's near-blasphemy. There are large differences of opinion on *Job*; and there are passages as translated in the "Authorized Version" that are hopelessly misleading. How many who have found comfort in the verse, "I know that my redeemer liveth," know what the original reading was, and how utterly out of keeping with this pious assurance?

wealthy and prosperous man, a Sheikh in the land of Uz; his possessions were incredible, his family large and happy; he was a man to be envied. Yahweh was proud of him, and on the occasion of the assembly of the spiritual beings (a trace of the original polytheism here) he boasts of Job's integrity to the Accuser, or "searcher out", not our Devil or Satan. The response of this worldly-wise and cynical spirit is that Job is being well paid for his righteousness. "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will renounce thee to thy face."

Then came the series of catastrophes when all his cattle, his sheep, his camels were lifted by the enemy, and his children killed by a whirlwind. But Job's response was not the expected one.

"Then Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; and he said:

Naked came I out of my mother's womb,  
And naked shall I return thither!  
The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away:  
Blessed be the Name of the Lord!

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness."

Again there was the assembly in heaven, and again the pride of Yahweh in the integrity of Job. To this the Accuser replied insolently: "Skin for skin, and yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face."

"So the Adversary went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal, and he sat among the ashes.

"Then said his wife unto him, 'Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God and die.'

"But he said unto her, 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women



speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

"In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

The moral of this folk-tale again is as old as trustful humanity. "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." And the moral is made good at the end of the book by the divine restoration of his health and property and a new generation of sons and daughters. If this were all there were to the book of *Job*, he might well deserve the reputation of being the most patient man of history. And though we might raise a question or two regarding the justice that was meted out to the children and the curious ethics that permitted so savage a test of a man's integrity, we might find edification in the experience—so long as we refuse to translate it out of its ancient background.

But this last was precisely what the poet did who directly challenged the justice of the Almighty. The Job of Chapter III to Chapter XXXVIII is not the Job of the simple folk-tale, but a daring thinker, almost blasphemous in his impatient grief, a man who had felt the insistent demand of the Greek that life present an intelligible pattern. Yet at the same time the poet was a Hebrew, with the intense inner consciousness of his God and a deep conviction of the devastating effect of sin. So the poem sets itself a double inquiry, to discover a definition of sin and of cosmic justice. And his poetic nature, rather than philosophical, is nowhere more evident than in the structure of the poem. Plato or Socrates would have proceeded by the well-known method of the dialectic and arrived perhaps at an impasse where at least the issues would have been clear, or at some solution, as in the *Republic*. But the unknown poet here is unacquainted with the dialectic or despises its pedestrian method. He gives us instead a series of lyrical poems,

each having the well-known Hebrew intensity, each challenging the central problem, or in turn suggesting an approach to an answer. Job is not, as some assert, either a drama or a philosophical dialogue; it is a collection of intense lyrics, a poetic symphony. It has also been called a sceptical poem. But this is hardly fair to its form or spirit. It is not an argument, for we never lose contact with the actors or the story.

Job in his desolation is visited by three of his old-time friends; "and when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice and wept. . . . So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him; for they saw his grief was very great." When Job first speaks it is with the utterance of a curse upon the day of his birth. Never has anything so deeply moving been expressed in all poetry—the curse of a man who hates life and longs for death:

"For now should I have lien down and been quiet;  
I should have slept; then had I been at rest,  
With kings and counsellors of the earth. . . .  
There the wicked cease from troubling;  
And there the weary be at rest.  
There the prisoners are at ease together;  
They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.  
The small and great are there;  
And the slave is free from his master."

Then he springs to the chief question:

"Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,  
And life unto the bitter in soul?"

To this question, that the world has asked from the day when conscious man first felt his evil lot, there is no answer; but it has ever been the theme likewise of great poetry.

But Job's friends, very real friends, too, and not the cold comforters that many fancy, are shocked at the implication in Job's speech that all is not as it should be in the divine ordering of the universe. To them the ways of the Lord are always good, and justice is ever meted out to the evil doer. And Eliphaz answers, Eliphaz old like Job and kindly and courteous. He will not see his friend cast away when the voice of wisdom may yet save him. Remember, he says, the wisdom of the prophets and authors of the proverbs and psalms—Whatsoever a man soweth shall he reap.

"Remember, I pray thee, whoever perished, being innocent?  
Or where were the upright cut off?"

Even the best of men may fall into error and need correction, for how can a man measure justice with the Almighty?

"Shall mortal man be just before God?  
Shall a man be pure before his Maker?

. . . . .

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth:

Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.

For he maketh sore, and bindeth up;

He woundeth, and his hands make whole.

He shall deliver thee in six troubles;

Yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

There is something beautifully naïve about Eliphaz. Life for him has been a simple pattern and he can see no deeper than his own problem. His childish faith, however, brings the sufferer no balm, only resentment that at a time like this one should offer to a genuine grief the complacency of worn-out texts. Job cries out:

"The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.

. . . . .

What is my strength, that I shall wait?

Is my strength the strength of stones?

Or is my flesh of brass?"

Then with almost savage irony he turns and addresses the Almighty himself.

"When I say, My bed shall comfort me,

My couch shall ease my complaint:

Then thou scarest me with dreams,

And terrifiest me through visions:

. . . . .

If I have sinned, what can I do unto thee,

O thou watcher of men?

Why hast thou set me as a mark for thee,

So that I am a burden to myself?"

This is more than Bildad the next speaker can endure; and he breaks in with the direct charge that Job has deserved his fate on account of sheer wickedness. His words have been "like a mighty wind", but he can be answered in a word. "Doth God pervert judgement?" Job recognizes the greatness of God—a man is a fool to compare himself with the Spirit,

"Which removeth the mountains and they know it not,

When he overturneth them in his anger.

Which shaketh the earth out of her place,

And the pillars thereof tremble."

But this very greatness is the source of Job's chiefest difficulty. How shall man hope for justice from so transcendent a Being?

"For he is not a man as I am, that I should answer him,

That we should come together in judgement."

But

"Man that is born of a woman  
Is of few days, and full of trouble;  
He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down,  
He fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not."

Thus the dialogue continues, Job becoming more and more bitter in his angry resentment, now at his friends, now at the cause of his sufferings. His friends, alarmed at his blasphemy, shuddering at his fate, describe in words of great poetic power the fate of the wicked as the conviction of Job's sin grows stronger with his protestation of angry innocence. At the conclusion, wearied by the now angry importunity of his friends, Job makes one last appeal. He surveys his past life, and calls up the honor in which he was held by all so long as the Almighty was with him. With this he contrasts his present plight, when "they that are younger" have him in derision. Even the Almighty has forsaken him, until he is "brother to the jackals and a companion to ostriches." He follows with the oath of cleansing. He has been charged with manifold transgressions; now he will reply specifically to all. It is the climax of the poem and a fitting end. He has not followed vanity; he has not been guilty of the crimes that have been suggested. His life has been just and pure; he has not dealt unrighteously with man or woman; he has been kind to his slaves; he has lent his hand to the poor; he has respected property and not been guilty of avarice; he has kept his lips clean in worship. If any of these iniquities can be charged against him; if he has "walked with vanity", and his foot has "hasted to deceit",

"Let thistles grow instead of wheat,  
And cockles instead of barley."

Then turning to the Almighty, who is his only judge, he raises his head proudly:

“Lo here is my signature.”

He presents his case, let Him judge, if he be a God of justice.

The rest of the poem is an aftermath and a later addition. Man has answered and failed; for the human reason alone may not lift the veil and read the secrets of Infinite Power. Job has fearlessly and even blasphemously challenged Omnipotence to justify the life of man and the riddle of sorrow. Human ingenuity, the three friends, Job himself, and a later comer, Elihu, each tries to vindicate God and fails miserably. God alone can answer for God's works. And the poem closes with a chorus of mighty nature poems, sung from the throat of a whirlwind by the lips of the Highest. And there is nothing quite like these in any literature.

“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?  
Gird up now thy loins like a man;  
For I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?

—Declare, if thou hast understanding—

Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest?

Or who stretched the line upon it?

Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened?

Or who laid the corner stone thereof;

When the morning stars sang together,

And all the sons of God shouted for joy?'

. . . . .

Shall he that cavilleth contend with the Almighty?

He that argueth with God, let him answer it.”

To this there can be made only one answer, and it is made by the crushed Job.

"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?  
I lay mine hand upon my mouth."

Man cannot know! Wherefore man must "abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes." Such is the mournful end of the tragedy of Job—the eclipse of humanity. Even with the right of free inquiry vindicated, for God addressed himself to Job and not the three friends, man may not know the ways of God, for they are past finding out. For even if the old orthodoxy of justice and punishment may not always hold true, and the divine mystery hold other ends in view for its dealings with man, man must patiently submit himself to the divine plan. The poem is a magnificent flash of divine power, but as a revelation of the pattern of man's life in the divine scheme, it is only a whisper.

"How small a whisper do we hear of Him!  
But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

The Greek tragedian sought for and discovered a human motive in the mystery of evil. The Hebrew here as resolutely faces the problem, but he gazes into the face of Divinity itself for the answer and is only blinded for his pains. Nowhere is the essential difference between the Greek and the Hebrew more significantly set forth. And to the irritating question, what is sin, the poem discovers a not much clearer answer than the Hebrew prophet-historian, disobedience. But even this discovery led into a still more remote wilderness of doubt. If sin and suffering are not always cause and effect, then where shall we look for a clue to the mystery of suffering, and what is the meaning of sin? To this the Deity replies:

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth?"

Humanity stands dazed before such puzzles. Perhaps it always will.

Job was silenced but not convinced. This is obvious. The startling thing in the poem, the Hellenic note, was that Job alone was vindicated, while his friends who knew everything about Yahweh's moral code, were sharply reproved by His kindled wrath. They are the blasphemous ones, claiming to speak in His name; Job is yet righteous, though his bewildered search has led only into an abyss of mysticism. Before many centuries another Jew was to arise who with an even greater vehemence was to proclaim the inadequacies of the Scribes and the Pharisees who spoke the orthodox doctrine of Yahweh. And this leader the ancient Hebrew imagination was going to find even more difficult to silence.

Job was silenced but not convinced. He could give up neither his faith nor his trust in his human reason, two powers that seemed so utterly irreconcilable. There is latent in this alternative the seeds of another and possibly more devastating tragedy. What will happen to the mind that has been nourished on the ideal of a transcendent God and on the accepted creed of the insufficiency of the human reason, when this faith shall once have begun to falter? To such when once the trust in a God of righteousness has given way there is nothing left on which to build a philosophy of life. The thought is an unpleasant one, but has more than once been vindicated. With the Greek there was a partnership between God and man; if one of the partners failed or proved untrustworthy, the other was left to continue the business. But when man is only the journeyman in his master's vineyard, on the owner's death the



vineyard becomes only a desolate and meaningless world.

The ancient Hebrew mind was never so unlike the Greek as in its idea of philosophy. To the Greek the attainment of wisdom came with the knowledge of self and the attainment of the good life. To the Hebrew "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This does not mean that the Hebrew was unworldly. Far from it, for in his long and tempestuous career he accumulated more than his share of maxims to govern conduct. Such sententious sayings as these, though common in all oriental literatures, have books devoted to them in the Bible and were ascribed to Solomon, the wisest of Kings:

"A soft answer turneth away wrath:  
But a grievous word stirreth up anger."

OR

"A wicked woman  
Is as a yoke of oxen shaken to and fro:  
The grace of a wife  
Will delight her husband:  
And her knowledge will fatten his bones."

But it needs no power of divination to discover such truths. Socrates, when he went about his search for wisdom for this life, looked for something more fundamental. And the idea of an ethics founded upon a profound study of human nature the Hebrew never attained, in spite of his downright and admirable sense of moral duty. For to him ethics had its source in theology, and ethical action was conformity with the commands of the Deity. Hence the elaborate ritual of taboos and the ever-widening range of commands and laws, non-compliance with which was sin. And when the restless mind of a poet like that of Job strove for a definition of sin in other and more reasonable terms,

it was silenced by the proclamation of the divine transcendence.

But this is precisely an attitude that tears away the foundations of both science and philosophy. "Hast thou comprehended the breadth of the earth? Declare if thou knowest it all." At this question Job laid his hand upon his mouth; but Ulysses pushed into the unknown and brought back science. "What is man that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man that thou visitest him?" cries the psalmist, and shudders at the thought of man naked and lost in a world whose creator is "past finding out". The Greek makes his god in his own image and makes man the measure of the universe. "Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?" The Greek astronomers began the task and modern astronomy is continuing the traditions of pushing human knowledge beyond the farthest star. It is all a difference of national temperament and upbringing. The ancient Hebrew stood aghast before a universe that he could not and would not understand. Seeing a God and nature more powerful than man and more complex than human society, he drew the sponge across the problem and declared it a divine mystery and any effort at solution an impiety.

But he gave the world other gifts, which the Greek imagination never quite compassed. Intensely God-conscious, he drew also a sense of power and of security in the divine protection that we look for in vain in other literatures. The singer of "the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want", was conscious of something that Homer or Hesiod or Plato never quite attained. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord." Here again is a sentiment that the Greek might regard as a fantastic mystery. With this

trust in a Heavenly Father, and a loving desire to follow in his ways, there was given a new motive for moral duty—an intense love of righteousness that transcends reason and becomes an instinct. It was the kind of thing that can produce martyrs and saints as well as poets and crusaders. It was in time to become one of the chief motives of Christianity.

## II. THE KORAN—A SEQUEL

"Ye are all one brotherhood."

*Koran*

Why did Hebraism fail to become a world-conquering religion? It had the moral intensity. It had a larger dignity than its successor, Christianity, at its beginning. It certainly was better placed strategically than another sequel, Islam. Though its influence through its successors has been most profound in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and later in America, it itself always remained what it was in the beginning, the creed of a chosen few.

The briefest answer here is possible. There was in the first place a rigid exclusiveness about the Jew, a sense of aristocratic excellence, that at the very outset was a bar to any international program of proselytism. Then the minutiae of the Jewish code of law and ethics were too elaborate for the unadept. If a religion is to spread over large areas and among varied peoples, it must be both simple in creed and elastic to permit large variety of religious practice. This Christian missionaries have found in our own time, and this the earliest Christian apologists discovered when they attacked the creeds of the Roman Empire. The first great fight in recorded Christian history is Saint Paul's controversy with the faithful in Jerusalem over the inherited Jewish liturgy. Paul was quick to see that it all

had to be jettisoned if the faith of Christ was to survive; Paul was a statesman.

Likewise some six centuries later another religious poet and statesman was to have the same vision—Mohammed. Here was another creed, with the intensity of the Hebrew, born likewise in the desert, gaining the passionate adherence of the desert, threatening in the short span of a century to become the world religion. And its spiritual weapon was the poetry of a book as intensely God-conscious as the Hebrew prophet, the *Koran*.

The history of Islam is one of the wonders of the world—a miracle, say the devout, attested by the fanaticism of its first followers, proved by their victories over the infidel, and made manifest to the world by the centuries of its brilliant culture in the courts of Baghdad, Cairo, Delhi, and Granada. In the narrow space of less than a hundred years it had gathered strength—the desert of Arabia burst upon the astonished Roman world, swept Persia into the fold, conquered Egypt, and spread from the Hindu Kush mountains to the Straits of Gibraltar. In another it was to do battle on the plains of Châlons with the Frankish cavalry. To it we owe the vivid romances of Charlemagne and his Paladins. To it we owe the romantic history of the crusades. Inspired by it a new convert, the Ottoman Turk, was to wrest from Europe the traditional city of Constantinople, overrun Greece, make the Mediterranean Sea a lake for Barbary flotillas, and threaten the very walls of Vienna. The Cross and the Crescent—the long romance of the contest between these two symbols of two desert-born faiths, originating among tribesmen allied in race, tradition, and language, but now a contest between Asia and Europe, this was no idle poet's tale for the Europe of the centuries between Charlemagne and Charles the

Fifth. It was Asia's return for the conquests of Alexander the Greek and the genius of Rome. It was also something more.

And yet on its surface there is nothing simpler than this new thing—Mohammed a poet and the *Koran* his book. There are times when a single incident, commonplace almost, changes the complexion of the world—Buddha suddenly awakened as he sat in meditation under the sacred bo-tree; Christ dying on the cross; Mohammed having visions of the might of Allah and hearing his message. The *Koran* is poetry sung by an untutored but fervent mind, filled with the intensity of a living conviction. Here is one of the earliest of the *suras*, the kind of thing that can come to an intensely introspective soul, filled with thoughts of Omnipotence, conscious of its presence:

“Verily, we have caused It to descend on the night of POWER.  
And who shall teach thee what the night of power is?  
The night of power excelleth a thousand months:  
Therein descend the angels and the spirit by permission of  
their Lord for every matter;  
And all is peace till the breaking of the morn.”

It was on this Night of Power, when Mohammed was forty years old, that the first *sura* was revealed to him. It was the month of Ramadhan, and the angel Gabriel appeared to him exclaiming “Read!” He answered, “I am no reader.” Then seizing him the angel commanded again, and as the prophet refused to obey, gripped him once more and commanded:

“Read thou, in the name of thy Lord who created;—  
Created man from CLOTS OF BLOOD:—  
Read thou! For thy Lord is the most Beneficent,  
Who hath taught the use of the pen;—  
Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not.”

Contrast with this the calling of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the Bible. Then for the next twenty years came the succeeding revelations; jotted down by the poet on any medium that came to hand. These were later gathered and arranged according to length into the book as we now know it, each *sura* being given a title from some phrase, or key word, in its verses.

Who was Mohammed? He was a prophet, a proclaimer of divine truth. He belonged to the favored tribe, the Koreish, that had charge of the sacred Kaaba, the shrine in Mecca. Poor in his youth, but fascinating in person, he had attracted attention and made friends. His relatives were powerful. But his first office was as commonplace as any. He became steward to a wealthy widow Khadija; then prospering, married her. He traveled some, perhaps into Asia Minor. But his home was the desert where he often retired, like the Hebrew prophet, for meditation. Then came his burst of inspiration; and he became *The Prophet*.

To retort that there was nothing new in Islam, that it borrowed here from Christianity and there from Judaism, that the *Koran* is a farrago of fantastic legends, misstatements of history, superstition, wild nature poetry, and scientific nonsense, is to pass an utterly superficial judgment. To say farther that the later *suras*, composed when the Prophet became a military leader and statesman, are political and justify sometimes the whims and prejudices of the now worldly man of affairs, again is to miss the point. The *Koran* like any great poem is a state of mind, and its significance is its value. And judged by history, the *Koran* is a great book. It may have nothing new, but it states the old in a manner to carry conviction; and throughout it is pervaded by the intense sincerity of the poet-author.

Mohammedanism, like Judaism, is intensely God-conscious, with a conviction that creates the patient devotion of the saint or the abandon of the soldier; and Islam did both, only history prefers to record the exploits of the sword. It inspires poetry as well as wars, only the European world has been largely unacquainted with the poetry of Islam. Only in recent years have its treasures been made available in the haze of translations. But the mystic poets of Arabia and Persia, the *Sufis*, were as much in the tradition as the conquering soldiers Omar and Othman. The whole creed of the believer is summed up in a single sentence, "God is God and Mohammed is his Prophet." But the intensity of this consciousness of Allah can be seen best in the poetry it inspires:

"Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!  
The compassionate, the merciful!  
King on the day of reckoning!  
Thee *only* do we worship, and to Thee do we cry for help.  
Guide Thou us on the straight path,  
The path of those to whom Thou hast been gracious;—with  
whom thou art not angry, and who go not astray."

This is a prayer composed while Mohammed was yet an unacknowledged prophet in Mecca. His first convert was his wife, then his immediate relatives. But his sojourn in his own city was not without the bitterness of the prophet in his own country. The Koreish were jealous, for he threatened their religious supremacy as well as made naught of their creed. Like his monotheism, his ethical code was as direct and uncompromising as it was simple. Again it suggests the Hebrew, and is as intense, and can be as unpopular:

"What thinkest thou of him who treateth our RELIGION as a lie?  
He it is who thrusteth away the orphan,

And stirreth not others up to feed the poor.  
 Woe to those who pray,  
 But in their prayer are careless;  
 Who make a show of devotion,  
 But refuse help to the needy."

His brandishing of threats of Hell as often raised up enemies as it loosed the knees of converts. Here is his attack on a defamer:

"Woe to every BACKBITER, Defamer!  
 Who amasseth wealth and storeth it against the future!  
 He thinketh surely that his wealth shall be with him for ever.  
 Nay! for verily he shall be flung into the Crushing Fire;  
 And who shall teach thee what the Crushing Fire is?  
 It is God's kindled fire,  
 Which shall mount above the hearts of the damned;  
 It shall verily rise over them like a vault,  
 On outstretched columns."

The prophetic light in these early days is sometimes lurid, and the milk of kindness curdled.

As difficulties grew and even his life was in danger, he fled to Medina. This is the Hegira—the date by which the Faithful reckon the calendar. There he was received by a rival tribe with open arms, and his followers became an army. His story from now is one of triumphant progress. Before long he has gained his own city, by a battle, the first of the long series of wars against infidels, and the tradition is established. The propagation of the faith shall be by the force of arms; the unbeliever shall have his choice, Islam or the sword. Half the known world embraced Islam and became its fervent adherents. He had tried persuasion in his own city, but his people had rejected him; the fanaticism of his followers in the new city had left him little choice. In any case, the cause was the Faith. It



must triumph. The sword of fanaticism is a powerful argument; the Christian knight had also not been able to resist its appeal.

This is the Islam that is the most obvious and the one whose pressure the West has never forgotten. It is, however, its least attractive as well as its least relevant aspect. There is a superb grandeur in the earlier *suras* as they chant the perfection of Allah. So severe is his worship that there can be no tolerance of any suggestion of powers approaching his might; even the Christian mystery of the Trinity was to the Prophet an idolatrous heresy:

"SAY, He is God alone:

God the Eternal!

He begetteth not, and He is not begotten,

And there is none like unto Him."

He is a god of judgment, of rewards to the righteous and pains to the ungodly. Even medieval Christianity was never so downright in its pictures of the future life—a pure visualization of material things—a paradise of sensuous pleasure, a hell of harrowing physical pain.

"And call to mind the day when we will cause the mountains to pass away, and thou shalt see the earth a levelled plain, and we will gather mankind together, and not leave of them any one.

"And they shall be set before thy Lord in ranks:—'Now are ye come unto us as we created you at first: but ye thought that we should not make good to you the promise.'

"And each shall have his book put into his hand: and thou shalt see the wicked in alarm at that which is therein: and they shall say, 'O woe to us! what meaneth this Book? It leaveth neither small nor great unnoted down!' And they shall find all that they have wrought present to them, and thy Lord will not deal unjustly with any one."

"A stated banquet shall they have  
Of fruits; and honoured shall they be

In the gardens of delight,  
 Upon couches face to face.  
 A cup shall be borne round among them from a fountain,  
 Limpid, delicious to those who drink,  
 It shall not oppress the sense, nor shall they therewith be drunken.  
 And with them are the large-eyed ones with modest refraining glances,  
 fair like the sheltered egg."

To strengthen the purpose of the soldier's hand and the saint's heart, there runs through the *Koran* like an undertone a philosophy of *Kismet*, a fatalism that would appall a more curious mind, a thing that the Greek poet and philosopher set their wits to combat. "No one can die except by God's permission according to the Book that fixeth the term of life". "Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us. Our liege-lord is He, and on God let the faithful trust." This is a species of Stoicism, but wholly different in spirit from that which brought the contentment of natural law to Marcus Aurelius, or taught the gospel of indifference to the Sanscrit hero of the *Bhagavat Gita*. For it arms the heart of the soldier in triple brass as he casts away his life in war against the Infidel; convinced that his ways are in divine hands he feels no terror at the prospect of death; and beyond the grave is Paradise. A simple creed, but it produced a breed of world-conquerors who despised death. All this, however, is not new. The Crusader felt the same uplift of spirit as he went forth to do battle for the Cross. Any soldier will in time become a fatalist, and Islam is first and best a creed for soldiers.

Islam taught and practiced a doctrine of human brotherhood—for the faithful—and a theory of equality never before quite attained, and a little difficult to practice even to-day. Each great world religion has in its youth been inspired by the same ideal—the faithful are a large family,

and such inequality as may exist is an irrelevant episode. So began Buddhism in its protest against caste, so began also Christianity; but the fixed levels of society were too powerful for the new gospel when it became something more than an obscure cult. The spirit of human brotherhood is much talked about even in India to-day, and the name of Buddha is revered beyond all others; but the social system cruelly gives the lie to the theory; and the lot of the lowest is in that country the bitterest in the world. Also in Christianity, though Christ's gospel was preached alike to slave and master, the social edifice of Rome and of feudal Europe, was too strong for the delicate flower of social tolerance to bloom, except in the church.

But Mohammed's proclamation, "Ye are all one brotherhood" bore ample fruit in the centuries of Moslem culture. The *Koran* is full of it. "Mohammed is the apostle of God; and his comrades are vehement against the infidels, but full of tenderness among themselves." "And hold ye fast by the cord of God, all of you, and break not loose from it; and remember God's goodness toward you, how that when ye were enemies, He united your hearts, and by his favor ye became brethren." There has ever remained a wealth of meaning in these cries for a united brotherhood among all believers. Rich and poor, slaves and princes, stand equal before the awful majesty of Allah; but Moslem society has never shut the door in the face of poverty or bondage. The adroit slave to-day may find himself a prince and founder of a dynasty tomorrow; and the world is not surprised. Arabic poetry and fiction is full of these stories of the unfortunate that rose to power and happiness, and of the powerful that sank to servitude. Such is also the story of history. Commonplace adventurers like Tamerlane or Baber found dynasties. Slaves become emperors

and build great cities like the Lodi's and Taghlakh's of India. Napoleon, to encourage his soldiers, is said to have remarked that every private carried a field marshal's baton in his knapsack. The faithful Moslem on more than one occasion became an emperor.

A curious jumble of verse and prose is this book of Mohammed's prophecies. To the Western reader it reveals strange flights of an unrestrained imagination, visions of the Deity, of the day of wrath, of might and power beyond anything save in the sublimest utterance of the Hebrew poets. It is also a book of counsel by a statesman, a battle cry of a fanatical host, an exultation of victory, a vision of peace. It is a book of law combining wise advice and careful admonition. It is a book of magic and superstition, reveling in the dark mysteries of djinns and demons and spirits of the three regions. It is the Arab imagination with the clearness of vision of the desert, but thrilled with its ineffable power, the pitiless sun, the biting frost, and the gathering skirts of the whirlwind. In this region we are at the point of farthest remove from Greece.

We can understand then its early enthusiastic intolerance. There is the story that when Omar, the conquering Khalif, captured Alexandria, he ordered the destruction of the famous library. To the protest that there were in it the treasures of man's wisdom, he replied: "If they agree with the *Koran*, they are unnecessary; if they contradict it, they are impious." To this there is no answer. And whether the story is true or not, there is no need to inquire; some false tales are truer than truth.



## IX. THE TWO ETERNITIES

### I. MONK AND KNIGHT

"And as the blessed Apostles were miracles of sanctity before the whole world and filled with the Holy Spirit, so these holy companions of Saint Francis were men of such piety, that from the days of the Apostles to these the world saw never such wondrous and gracious men; wherefore one of them was caught up unto the Third Heaven, as was Saint Paul; another was touched on the lips by an Angel of God with a coal of fire, as was Isaiah the prophet; another communed with God as friend with friend, as did Moses; another mounted on the wings of his sapience to the light of divine wisdom, as the eagle; another was sanctified by God and canonized in Heaven while yet he passed his days on Earth."

*Little Flowers of St. Francis.*

"And he had ben somtyme in chivachye,  
And born him well, as of so litel space,  
In hope to stonden in his lady grace."

CHAUCER.

*The Middle Ages!* A prosaic name, this, for a time that has been the ever-recurrent inspiration for poetry. It was the day when Europe with the enthusiasm of youth was arming itself for crusades against Saracen and Moor, or wandering up and down the highways and byways of the world in imagination, with lance and buckler and sword, astride a gaily caparisoned destrier, and lute on thigh, singing the extravagant praise of a far-away princess it was a holy devoir to rescue or maintain her peerless charm against all comers. It was the day of the youthful thrill of the romance of Charlemagne or King Arthur, or the lesser and more intimate charm of Aucassin and Nicolette

and their deeds that lull incredulity into pious faith. It was the sun-clear morning of personal honor and stainless faith like that of Chevalier Bayard, the knight without fear and without reproach. It was also the rollicking coarseness of unreflecting Goliardic mirth:

“ ’Tis most arduous to make  
Nature’s self surrender;  
Seeing girls, to blush and be  
Purity’s defender!

We young men our longings ne’er  
Shall to stern law render,  
Or preserve our fancies from  
Bodies smooth and tender.”<sup>1</sup>

In this dawn all Europe was stirring with the issues of a new life, before the evil days came that were to bring the calculating wisdom of age. “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was”. . . the romance of chivalry.

But it was also—strange paradox—the twilight of an old age that was passing. Saint Francis, the careless and gay youth, stricken in conscience as the sin of the world suddenly is felt as a burden too heavy for his narrow shoulders, in an agony of self-reproach renouncing the sweetness of life that barefoot he might tread the thorny path of salvation. A new crusade, and an ironical chivalry, the devotion of this sweet ascetic, whose lady is the Madonna, whose panoply of war is the “little brother’s” coarse frock and girdle, and whose enemy is the pride of life. A new romance, this, where for the stricken field is the painful wrestling in prayer and the long vigil, and fasting and hunger, and a loosening of the sinews of desire, until in a triumph of spirit may come the gracious vision of the face

<sup>1</sup> From *Wine, Woman, and Song*. Arthur Symonds.

of God and the chant of heavenly choristers. And in an effort to drown the abandoned mirth of Goliardist and the plaintive love songs of troubadours, rise from a hundred cathedrals the minatory chants of a day of doom.

*"Dies irae, dies illa  
Solvat saeculum in favilla."*

Europe is old, very old, and thinking deeply of its precarious future.

Yes, the Middle Ages are conscious, deeply conscious, of the mystery of life and death. The old pagan world with its unquestioning faith in this life has passed. The new world is white before the dawn, its carols are being sung by the new poets, the troubadours, the minstrels of the new romance. The new nations and languages of Europe are just beginning with painful uncertainty to recognize their lineaments. Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Englishmen, are learning to take pride in themselves and to speak with confidence their new language; and national boundaries, these things so real in these our later days, are painfully acquiring some hazy significance. The new science and learning is discovering itself to be attractive; and the universities that are to become the glory of the nations are slowly getting themselves founded. For everything is fluid, and no one is bold enough yet to speak with confidence of the future. No one? Yes, one institution, founded on a "rock" on that day when Christ sent forth his Apostles to all nations, has the conscious vigor of achieved maturity. It speaks with no uncertainty on the issues of life and death; and to its voice there is no one who dares fail to give heed.

For centuries the Church, in a life and death struggle with the pride of life, had boldly proclaimed a contempt

of life and a pride in death. It had valiantly closed its eyes to all allurements of the flesh so long as the life and death contest with paganism lasted, until its gesture of renunciation had become a fixed habit. Then in the evil days that followed the loss of the old culture, when barbarism and illiteracy had become all but universal, when learning had become less than pedantry and poetry had fled to the waste places to be born anew among a people who knew not Greece and Rome, in those days of famine and penury in art and literature only the Church was left to hold up a lighted torch and lead to better things. And now that a new Europe was recovering from the gropings of the long centuries of darkness, the Church was to come into its own, and reap the harvest whose seed centuries before had been so diligently planted.

The reward was to be a bountiful crop of saints, the soldiery of the Church: Saint Thomas, the philosopher theologian, Saint Francis, the man whose life was a constant prayer of good deeds, who sought for the things of eternal value in the gospel of lowly service. These are two worthy examples of how the age sought for eternal treasure. The one gives the ideal of austere scholarship, reverence for the riches of philosophy which his study was to weld into the corpus of Christian theology. Patiently, with a life's devotion, he used his dialectic, building up the huge system of unnumbered tomes, the *Summa*, that even today to the Catholic world is the highest achievement of inspired human wisdom. The other—read the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, to see what an affectionate memory of this gentle saint built as a tribute to his service for others and his love for his Master. How there were none so lowly as to be below his all-embracing love; how he preached to Brother Wolf who had terrorized a neigh-



borhood, beast and man, and how the wolfish crest bowed itself before the gentle rebuke, and the fearful beast became as gentle as gentle. How when the clamor of a flock of birds disturbed his devotion, he turned and addressed the little creatures:—"Sisters mine, ye birds, you are much beholden to God your creator, and in every place it behooves you to praise Him in that He has given you the power to fly . . . therefore Sisters mine, beware of the sin of ingratitude and study to be always in praise of God." So ardent was his heart with love that before his death he was signalized with the blessed marks of Christ's own wounds. Saint Thomas, the angelic doctor of science and theology; Saint Francis, the humble sower of good deeds for God and man, of such was the Kingdom of Heaven in these Middle Ages, so all-embracing was its power and scope. Before it the humble and the proud, the emperor and the clown, stood on equal feet.

Never in Europe before or since was the pressing need of the rites and powers of religion so intimately felt as in the two centuries that preceded the poet Dante. It was the time when the thunder of excommunication could bring an Emperor barefoot and on his knees before the throne of a Pope. For the Church held the keys to Heaven and Hell, and had the power to open and close in the name of the Almighty. The issues of life were precarious, death was the gateway to the two infinities, one celestial, the other infernal. How shall a man so order this life that his eternal welfare may be assured? Never before had this question, and never has it since, been of quite this supreme significance. So men built in the Church their cities of refuge, and so they numbered their days, that they might attain to true wisdom. There were those who in panic shunned the temptations of the world and fled to a *monastery*, happy if

though alive enjoys the ecstasy of Heaven. But to most life is a purgatorial compromise with moments of vision and long vigils of pain and alert penitence; and before all ever yawned the menace of the abyss.

For the Middle Ages believed in Hell, and shuddered at the thought. Many a saint woke screaming from a vision of its awful torment, and the poetry of even the blessed souls is full of its terror. The crude frescoes one may see on the walls of village churches of spirits in the flames—I am thinking now of one I saw back in the hills behind Ravello—while the blessed spirits surrounding the Madonna look down and smile, or the more detailed paintings of the Last Judgment and the fate of sinners, such as the panorama of the Campo Santo in Pisa, these things meant damnation or salvation to the downright Middle Ages. Over them always there is written in imagination the *memento mori*. Where shall one pass eternity? And the state of eternal misery is achieved in this life, and its sign is a hardness of heart and a turning away from the means of salvation.

There is a little story that more beautifully perhaps than any illustrates this ideal of the Middle Ages. It tells of a poor *jongleur*, an acrobat, that becoming convinced of sin entered a monastery. But he was illiterate and rude, and while his brothers read the offices or joined in the learned rituals of service, he found himself alone unable to perform any deed for the glory of God and his Lady. So in the crypt in a narrow chapel before the altar he exercised his only mystery, dancing and capering before the blessed Virgin, until exhausted he fell before her in a faint. But the brothers and the Abbot, who had been summoned by a curious spy on his antics, saw the vision of the gracious reception of his ignorant devotion. Our Lady

and all her glorious train filled the narrow chapel, and with blessed pity she bent and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Then the sweet and courteous Queen herself took a white napkin in her hand, and with it gently fanned her minstrel before the altar. Courteous and debonair, the Lady refreshed his neck, his body and his brow. Meekly she served him as a handmaid in his need. But these things were hidden from the good man, for he neither saw nor knew that about him stood so fair a company."

But life was as sweet in the Middle Ages as to-day, perhaps sweeter, because it was more precarious. And all Romance becomes an active protest against the denial of the beauty of living. Adventure, the sweetness of human society and friendship, the thrill of battle against odds, the glory of achievement, and above all, the charm and mystery of woman and love—these things, though they find scant space in the *Book of Hours of the Virgin* or in the *Golden Legend* or the *Missal*, are not by a wave of the hand, or the peril of Satan and his works, to be banished from the healthy human mind. The career of Richard the Lion Hearted, the glorious friendship of Roland and Oliver, the company of the Round Table, Lancelot, Tristram, Percival; the exquisite heroines—as exquisite as the knights—Guenevere, Isolde, Bradamante, their names are a galaxy of pearls; lovers all, knights and ladies, and their deeds an intoxication of the imagination.

The sweetest of these stories, and one of the shortest, is the lay of *Aucassin and Nicolette*. Aucassin, the youthful son of a Provençal nobleman; Nicolette, the captured Saracen maid, now a Christian and the freed inmate in a noble house. So exquisite is her charm that it has magic power of healing.

"Out of Limousin there drew  
One, a pilgrim, sore adread,  
Lay in pain upon his bed,  
Tossed, and took with fear his breath,  
Very dolent, near to death,  
Then you entered, pure and white,  
Softly to the sick man's sight,  
Raised the train that swept adown,  
Raised the ermine-bordered gown,  
Raised the smock, and bared to him  
Daintily each lovely limb.  
Then a wondrous thing befell,  
Straight he rose up sound and well,  
Left his bed, took cross in hand,  
Sought again his own dear land."

But Aucassin though he loves to distraction may not wed, for she is a paymin slave, and though baptised far below him in rank. Hear his reply:

"In Paradise what have I to do? I care not to enter, but only to have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, whom I love so dearly well. For into Paradise go none but such people as I will tell you of. There go those aged priests, and those old cripples, and the maimed, who all day long and all night cough before the altars, and in the crypts beneath the churches; those who go in worn old mantles and old tattered habits; who are naked, and barefoot, and full of sores; who are dying of hunger and of thirst, of cold and of wretchedness. Such as these enter in Paradise, and with them have I nought to do. But in Hell will I go. For to Hell go the fair clerks and the fair knights who are slain in the tourney and the great wars, and the stout archer and the loyal man. With them will I go. And there go the fair and courteous ladies, who have friends, two or three, together with their wedded lords. And there pass the gold and the silver, the ermine and all rich furs, harpers and minstrels, and the happy of the world. With these will I go, so only that I have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, by my side."

It is the youthful Middle Ages speaking and laying caressing hands on life, even at the cost of tragedy. Love is a

thing one may stake Heaven to win. And many a knightly romance throws the fatal dice for a kiss and a moment of rapture. A new ecstasy, this, an earthly one purely, to set against the saint's rapture on beholding the face of Our Lady and God. A Greek imagination would have been startled at the discovery of this paradox. The earthly heaven of lovers with its transcendental praise of the bliss of knightly love, a celestial heaven with its transcendental praise of the bliss of divine love. The Middle Ages strove for both, and in the songs of lesser poets show us tragedy. But in the song of its greatest poet it solved the paradox and knew the eternal richness of both; and that poet was Dante.

But lesser poets show us tragedy. Aucassin and Nicolette, after long wanderings, are united, as are the hero and heroine in an oriental romance, only after they have learned obedience, and their love was holy, though they knew it not. But Tristram and Isolde? Here we touch the eternal laws as society and the Church had consecrated them. Isolde is the wife of King Mark of Cornwall. Tristram is his dutiful nephew, the son of sorrow. He is the redoubtable knight, she the peerless in beauty, as the story comes to us from the harp of the Minnesinger, Gottfried von Strassburgh. Mark is not the hero whom such a flower should adorn. The young knight had been sent to bring her as a bride to his uncle. But youth and youth, —and whether the magic love potion the lovers drank was real or only the glamor of the sea and the warmth of their glances, the way of hero with maid and maid with hero was vindicated anew. They loved, and in spite of the jealousy of court and of spies, in spite of the knowledge of Mark himself, had joy in their love. Unrepentant of sin, both go to a violent death, a tragedy of a love that will not be

restrained, such as we shall meet again in the story of Paolo and Francesca against the black tempest of the incontinent in Dante's *Inferno*. Such is the story, too, of the love of Lancelot and Guenevere, betraying by its vehemence the trust of the gentle King Arthur.

Love is love, a passion that brooks no laws when it fires gentle hearts. Of its manner and coming and going no man may know, though the debris it leaves in its wake, and the passionate ecstasy of those that know its power, these are the themes of a hundred romances, "e'er ever the knightly days were gone, with the old world to its grave". Love is its own vindication. Its dictates may not be denied, for "love runneth soone in gentle heart"; and only the gentle may know its supreme power. The church may thunder its anathemas, the law may quote age-old commandments, but the lover once fired by the *gentle* passion, and it is only gentle because it is noble, may not deny its power. He has become the knightly slave of love and its mysteries.

Not all the great romances so fearlessly assert the supreme power of this noble passion. In all or nearly all, on the contrary, there comes at times a latent fear for the future. Percival, the hero of Wolfram von Eschenbach in his long adventure for the Grail, learns the mystery of love and then wisely abstains as he thrusts forward in his search for the greater mystery of religion. The Grail, the holy vessel once touched by the lips of Christ, would to its possessor bring a far truer ecstasy and more abiding than the lips of woman. Lancelot retires to spend his last days in a monastery, there to atone for his sins. Galahad, the virgin knight, from the first, though born of an illicit union, is vowed to utter continence and rejoices in his ascetic devotion. Though this is romance, it is one that has heard the chant of the litany and joins, reluctantly, in the diapason of

the *Miserere*. It is youth, but youth terrified by the spectre of old age.

Out of this strange mingling of religious asceticism and romantic youth was born that most beautiful of all virtues of the Middle Ages, a thing that has been with us for many centuries, and which we pray a new science and a new social order will not utterly deny. Chivalry is an ideal, a code of manners, a discipline of loyalties, a system of values for life, and an enthusiastic acceptance of its responsibilities. It is in its essence the very flower of the Middle Ages; a flower so delicate that only the rarest of spirits could approach it; yet with a perfume so compelling that none could fail to come under its influence. It is an aristocratic ideal wholly, demanding of its votary the noblest of impulses and the larger freedom to carry them to action. The fact that it so seldom was discovered in its purity in real life is no reproach to its charm, for was it not after all an ideal? But it did show its power in romance and poetry.

Its watchwords were truth, honor, bravery, and loyalty, and its symbol the order of knighthood. So Chaucer feels it and sets it forth in the picture of his knight:

"A worthy man  
That fro the tyme that he first bigan  
To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,  
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye."

Consistent with the ideals of the Middle Ages, it was at once devout in religion and romantic in adventure and love. For it clothed romance in the mystery of religious adoration, it made religion the motive for romance, thus seeking somehow for the synthesis that could taste the beauty of this world and not dull the palate for the joys of the hereafter. It gave a new definition to the gentleman,

as it gave him a new motive for living. It disciplined war into chivalric bravery, for it strove to strip it of bestial passion and blind hate, and wedded bravery to truth and honor. Wars could not be abolished, but they might be honorable in emulation and generous to the defeated. And the pageantry of medieval knightly combats yet thrills the imagination in these our later days. It made a lie the vilest reproach and a gentleman's word of more worth than his bond. It exalted the motive of honor until the slightest stain on a gentleman's escutcheon was a deeper wound than defeat or loss of estate. It taught a despising of wealth and mere material ambition that recalls the poverty of the saints. A gentleman's honor and sword were his wealth, his horse and adventure his kingdom, and his loyalties his ideal.

The ideal knight is no lone adventurer; rather he is bound by the strictest ties of loyalty to those he must serve. Goethe later, when he thinks of a new chivalry for nineteenth century Europe calls them reverences, and their scope is to be all-inclusive—reverence for superiors, reverence for equals, reverence for inferiors. But the Middle Ages are aristocratic, and the knight's vows were loyalty to one's God, loyalty to one's overlord, and loyalty to one's lady. Thus were the needs of religious devotion secured; thus was the structure of feudal society given a religious vindication; and thus woman becomes, not alone the companion of man, but his inspiration for nobler deeds and his reward to be achieved only by arduous service. Chivalry was the answer the Middle Ages tried to make to the opposed claims of the world and religion. But a perilous answer, for only a true gentleman could move unerringly along its narrow and difficult path.

The writer of romance had striven in the tales of Arthur,



of Tristram, of Percival, of Roland and Oliver, of Troilus and Cressida, or of Palamon and Arcite, to draw the portrait of the perfect knight and the peerless lady; but all somehow had fallen short. The Greek imagination frankly faced the world as it saw it and sought only to make it intelligible; it accepted tragedy or comedy when it came, as it accepted the tides or an eclipse, looking only for its intelligibility. The Middle Ages demanded more, that man's ways, and woman's should somehow, somewhere, square with the eternal verities; and that this life should be an allegory of the life to come and patterned on its model. How then can chivalry, beautiful as an ideal, ever accept the wayward love of a Tristram or the pained renunciation of a Percival? Where shall it find meaning or edification in the madness of Roland, or the coquetry of Cressida? Where the Greek might have become wise in the ways of love and anger, the medieval mind became perplexed and troubled, and built for the soul mansions in Hell as well as in Heaven, counting as wasted or even infernal human nature these examples of passion frustrated or misdirected.

The Greek was concerned with the ways of man to man; these later and theologically-minded inquirers, who know their God, are ever urging man to justify his ways before the divine tribunal. And in the daily judgment they pass, more than many are condemned. When shall arise the poet who can see God and man eye to eye and justifying the ways of God to man, may also achieve the impossible and justify the ways of man to God? The poet of *Job* tried it, but all he got for his pains was the voice from the whirlwind which commanded his silence. Dante will try it, and be granted a vision of the two eternities, but more than this, the vision, too, of this world and its meaning. And

of these visions this second may be the far more significant and lend a richer meaning to medieval chivalry..

## II. DANTE ALIGHIERI

"Why doth our sin so cruelly waste us?"

*Inferno.*

"The heavens call you and around you turn,  
Showing eternal splendor to your eyes,  
And yet ye gaze still downward to the earth."

*Purgatorio.*

"Insensate care of mortals, what defects  
Are in those syllogisms which make thee beat  
Thy wings to what is base. . . .

. . . . . While disengaged  
From all these things I was with Beatrice  
Above in Heaven thus gloriously received."

*Paradiso.*

"Through me ye go to the abode of woe;  
Through me ye go to the eternal pain;  
Through me ye go to be among the lost."

This is the warning Dante has carved over the grotesque gateway to Hell. His was a perilous journey even in the company of the trusted poet Virgil. Among the lost people in the city of sorrow he saw what would turn even the stoutest imagination. Lost souls, in the place where hope never comes that comes to all, the home of eternal blasphemy and black hate. It is not the picture of human misery, the degradation and denial of humanity, that is the terror of hell, not the stark horror of eternal pain, the fire and the ice, but the clutching knowledge that here we have a people eternally at rest—not a surcease from suffering, but a loss of desire even to be at peace. It is a humanity that has crystallized in its eternal denial of everything that humanity holds of value. This is the scene Dante holds out as the allegory of damnation. This is Hell.

Is it to be wondered at that the man who had seen and known this, the blackest and most realistic picture of human fate, should have been an object of terror to some of his contemporaries, that he has come to be known as the *anima triste*, the sad spirit, to us even of this later and unbelieving age? Boccaccio, his early biographer, tells this story:—He was “always of a sad and thoughtful countenance. For which reason once in Verona, the story of his poem being well known to many, when he was passing a doorway where some women were seated, one of them in a voice loud enough to be heard by him and those with him said to the other women: ‘Lo the man who went to Hell and returns thither when he pleases.’ ”

But the *Inferno* does not display the whole personality of the poet. He could ascend the heights as well as plumb the depths; and as he girds himself for the flight to the highest heaven he exclaims again, in warning to his readers:

“O ye, who in a very little bark,  
Eager to listen, have been following  
Behind my ship that singing makes its way,  
Turn back to look again upon your shores;  
Put ye not out to sea, lest it befall  
That, losing me, ye should remain astray.”

For here we shall gaze upon a new humanity, redeemed and purged of all earthly dross, the saints of this earth and the angelic hierarchies of heaven, the Virgin Mother, the Son, and even the lineaments of God himself. In this supernal region the secrets of the universe shall be revealed, the love “that moves the sun and every star.” Here shall be granted the vision of the “eternal rose” of heaven, the river of light, the whole cosmic beauty of the Eternal and Infinite. Can mortal imagination compass the flight? And

Dante warns his reader whose shallow vessel may be unworthy the trial.

And Dante's two warnings have been much needed. It is only the highest courage and the amplest understanding that may follow his footsteps. The journey is not an excursion among fantastic and fascinating regions, with glimpses of horror or ecstasy to which only a credulous interest is invited. It is the largest effort ever made by poet, ancient or modern, to catch in richest measure the secret of human life. It is not a vision of the next world alone, though couched in the allegory of a dream; it is not alone Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, that he curiously explores, but a real experience of this life in all its manifold aspects, from damnation to sainthood, from brute ignorance of the good to perfect illumination of the eternally true, from the beast to the purged and disciplined man. It is an adventure in search of complete freedom, and he therefore shows us the nature of complete bondage. It is a panorama of this world in its multitudinous aspects vividly presented, so that he that reads may take thought.

More than this, it is Dante's answer to the persistent question of his age and all ages—the meanings of freedom, of perfect harmony, of a life of perfect beauty; and never had there been a time when such a search was more appropriate, and its difficulties more bewildering. The romantic knight sought for freedom in worthy and loyal activity, like the Greek hero, in the self-respect that accompanies honor and truth; and for the beauty of life he looked to chivalric love, and in the idealized union of the sexes for the flower that gives honor a crown. But always there was present even in the ecstasy of accomplished love, the haunting sense of some value ignored, of a bondage to the flesh from which even the most chivalric shrank as from some

unclean thing. And Lancelot and Percival find themselves slowly drawn from this world to the quiet cells of a monastery there to rid themselves of mortal error and find freedom for their souls.

The ascetic, likewise, in his austere discipline of the flesh never quite achieved complete unconsciousness of the beauty of this world whose sinful pleasures he had renounced. Whether in the ecstasy of vision or in the self-inflicted torture of flagellation there would arise like ghosts suppressed desires, until, as with even the most blessed, prayers would be punctuated with confessions of unworthiness and sin. For the ascetic stood ever, like Saint George, with his foot upon the dragon of his defeated self, defeated but not slain, and whose painful writhings he could never wholly ignore. This attitude again, though splendidly heroic at times and deserving the saint's crown, is never quite convincing as being freedom.

Perhaps better than any man of his time, Dante was well equipped for the search. He had been a man of affairs in Florence when politics and intrigue tore the city into rival factions that were always preparing new civil wars. And the rival claims of Pope and Emperor, and the princes of France and Spain, supplied new motives when old issues seemed exhausted. Finally he was exiled and spent the best years of his life in a constant effort to bring his countrymen to right reason. He was a scholar with a taste that carried him from theology to science. He was a poet, whose lesser work, had he never composed the *Divine Comedy*, would have given him an honored place in Italian literature. In him seemed to converge all the impulses of the Middle Ages, the irritating questions of philosophy and science, politics and religion, literature and art. Probe his work anywhere and you find his restless mind at work

in the best manner of the Middle Ages. But there is also something more—a new theory of human values that even the best minds of his time had never dreamed of.

The *Divine Comedy* divides into three poems—the Hell, the Purgatory, and the Heaven. At first sight, and rightly, this looks like an effort to penetrate into the mystery of the next world and to discover to us the fate of mortals who offend or follow the divine plan. To see the poem only thus is to get something, but something not greatly different from the visions of the other-world caught by his daring predecessors. Homer had gone to Hades as an adventure to extend his circle of human knowledge. Virgil went to indulge in a bit of Roman propaganda. On a superficial view, Dante, too, went that he might warn his contemporaries and “to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity.” I quote from Dante’s own dedicatory letter. But in this day when the question of the future life and its possible “state of misery” does not obsess the imagination, such an interpretation of the poem will be somewhat antiquated. Can a deeper and a more generously human motive also be discovered? What does he mean by a state of misery and of felicity? The answer will be discovered in his definition of freedom.

But even as a bare record of an imaginary journey, Dante’s is one that thrills an active imagination. The universe as he conceives it follows the outlines of the old astronomy. Hell is a conical pit driven to the center of the Earth, with its nine concentric circles each appropriately designed to disclose one sort of moral viciousness. Satan, the Arch-fiend, for whom this region was created, stands transfixed in ice at the very center of the universe—at the point darkest and farthest from God. Purgatory is a huge

mountain, the displaced earth of the conical Hell, now risen in the Southern Hemisphere, and carrying at its summit the small plateau that once was the Garden of Eden, the home of our first parents, the Terrestrial Paradise, the place of perfect human virtue and innocence. The ten heavens stretch in concentric crystalline spheres, seven of them bearing the planets, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn; the eighth, carrying the fixed stars; the ninth is the *Primum Mobile*; and the tenth, the Empyrean, the timeless and spaceless abode of Eternal Deity. This is not quite so fantastic as it sounds to-day, with our new astronomy and our boundless reaches of cosmic space; for it was all as exact and scientific as the measurements and the observation of the time could make it, and within the limits of his science, Dante is as exact as Newton or Einstein. Even Milton, who was acquainted with the new, preferred for poetic reasons the old astronomy; but Dante accommodates his poem to the best knowledge of his time.

The power that moves the universe and preserves its order is Love, an active virtue from the throne of God, and its manifestations in the cosmic heavens are through the active agency of the angels.

"The Love that moves the Sun and every star."

It is this virtue also that should move the earth and does where order abounds. It is identical with what our scientist to-day would describe as "natural law". It is the law of the universe. Only to Dante its source is the Divine Spirit that is Nature's God. So far, surely, modern science can have no fundamental quarrel with the medieval philosopher and poet.

Only in the heart of man is the law of love not always

operative in the designed manner; for man is free, and by his fall from the state of paradisiacal innocence he lost the art of always willing the wisest and best. To support him in his crisis, so that his will may be cultivated to virtue, he has his reason, which by human experience has cultivated the sciences and philosophy, the means for the education of the human race. These come to their flower in law, which is crystallized in the government of states and in the ideal of the Empire, the fountain of law and virtuous living. Philosophy, science, law, government, empire, are the symbols of the love that should guide man in his appetites as well as in his social relations. And man's sins are perversions of this law of love, either through excess or deficiency, or through the loving of objects unworthy or socially destructive. Again in all this the modern ethical philosopher can find no fundamental fault with Dante's theory of life.

But there is also a higher region of knowledge than that developed and explained by human philosophy, the world of spirit. For the world of nature, that of sense, is only the lower half of the full life of man. Behind and giving it life and meaning is the world of spirit, a new dimension, as it were, that has a new system of law, or better, where the law of love manifests itself in a new manner with other formulas and other equations undiscoverable by human philosophy and science. This is the region that man was first created to occupy, all in such time as his nature would allow—so runs Dante's argument—but from which he was excluded by the rebellion that led to his fall. Here there is a more intimate and immediate manifestation of the divine nature. And it is only by theology, the divine science given through revelation, that man may enter this region.



Again, in all this, the modern scientist may find it not a little difficult to obtrude a serious objection. Dante's thought is a strange anticipation of the position of the modern physical philosopher, who is slowly discovering that even to-day we must live and learn to be at home in two worlds. The one is that of objective sense, the world of concrete objects with size, shape and color, where a tree has a certain definite magnitude and shape, where a book has a certain number of pages with more or less regular markings on each, where a painting is a thing of certain definite or indefinite lines and masses of color. But examined closely and under the mathematical conditions to which we may subject each, the simple tangible character of each gives way to something curiously different from its common-sense form. The physicist will tell you that the tree is not a tree at all, or the book a thing of boards and paper and ink, or the painting a canvas with smears of colored oils and chemicals, but that all are flying masses of electrons with no pretense of material substance about them, flying but without either wings or bodies, swarms of gnats with the gnats abstracted; and that the only way we can talk about them and preserve our sense's integrity is by the means of mathematical symbols. Thus we have two worlds, both real, the symbolical world of mathematical formulas, and the sense world of tangible objects. We can touch the one and love it, and read it, or gaze at it in admiration; we can only be conscious of the other when we spread abstract figures on a page of paper and indulge in the higher mathematics.

But we may go even a step farther. The markings in the book, that look innocent enough to the uninitiated, may be charged with a symbolical meaning that may change the whole course of human history. It is not markings on

paper that we are gazing at, but the dynamic thought of genius. And the lines and masses of color on the canvas to him that can read their symbolism may be a Sistine Madonna that speaks a new comfort and gives a new meaning to the mystery of motherhood. No, the modern philosopher and scientist must listen patiently while Dante expounds his theory of a dual world in which we live—the world of sense and science and the world of spirit and theology. For it may be that this last world lacks something of the downright dogmatism we have too long associated with it.

With this explanation Dante's three-fold cosmic region acquires a new significance. Hell is the world of sense and philosophy where love has become perverted—where human nature has gone wrong and is now displaying its eternal depravity. Purgatory is the same world acquiring the noble gift of virtue, where philosophy is slowly and painfully teaching the right way, and where humanity is joyously, though yet troubled by a will that is not quite freed of its ancient curse, reclaiming its pristine innocence and freedom. And Heaven is man's true nature now gloriously displayed, when the higher reason, inspiration, theology, has finally and triumphantly brought the knowledge of true reality. And this final knowledge, symbolized by light, brings the highest bliss, freedom, and peace.

Such is the theme of the *Divine Comedy*. The state of misery is that of incomplete or imperfect or perverted love and knowledge. Remember these two terms with Dante are almost interchangeable. The state of felicity is the state of perfect love and knowledge. But, you ask, what has become of the "other life" with the judgments of Hell and rewards of Heaven? I answer boldly: Dante need not be concerned directly with either. His is a living poem

addressed to the living, and not a monument to the damned or redeemed departed.

Dante's Hell need not be read as a place of punishment, nor his Purgatory as a place of penitence and his Heaven of final reward. Far rather each is a revelation of human nature under one or other of its depraved or exemplary aspects. It is curious, is it not, that the pained spirits in Hell are unaware of their grotesqueness, indeed at times show pride of personality. Neither do they long for a more happy existence. Grotesque as they are, or tragic in their futility, racked by the bitterness of pain, or screaming with the agony of torment, they may never entertain the desire for a better lot, nor hope for a term to their agony. They are where they belong. By the cosmic order of things they have made themselves what they are; and the words, "abandon all hope ye that enter", carry a significance beyond hopelessness. It is not that hope is vain, but that the very power to hope has been lost. They would be out of step with the order of the universe were they otherwise. When Dante exclaims, "why doth our sin so devastate us"? he is not commenting on an eternal system of justice that waits for the evil doer; but on the free will of the evil doer himself that so disables his human nature. Hell is a manifestation of human depravity in its varied aspects, the allegory suited to the specific form of perverted love. Here the lusts of sense have been allowed to prevail over the natural powers of love directed by reason, or reason itself has been put to unreasonable use; and both like a wholesome draught now curdled by poison, destroy the life of the drinker.

Purgatory, too, is not simply a place of penance, but far rather a revelation of nature's discipline accepted by the will and directed by reason. No external power, but the

intelligent use of the understanding, directs the education of the senses and appetites here, until when the spirit is finally purged of the false allurements of misguided love, the human personality stands free and uncorruptible on the final heights of true innocence, the Terrestrial Paradise. From here, given the spark of the final knowledge that unites the spiritual world to the physical and illuminates both with divine radiance, the ascent to Heaven, the abode of perfect knowledge and peace, is the natural course of the human understanding. It is of these moments of highest revelation of truth, these times of ecstasy, when heaven and earth and all things human and divine seem opened like the rose of heaven for the aspiring spirit, when divine truth that moves the universe is revealed to the heart of man, in moments of illumination that have come to saints and poets, from Plato to Shelley, it is of such rapt moments that the poet would here furnish the clue. Dante's Heavens are an extended allegory of just such moments of sublimation of the human spirit and such ecstasy of transcendental peace. Then the whole cosmic order seems for the poet to be revealed down to its last mystery.

"I saw within its depths enclosed all that  
Which in the universe is scattered leaves,  
With love as in a single volume bound;  
Substance and accidents and properties  
Fused as it were together in such wise,  
That what I speak of is one simple Light."

Yet this is not a state where man takes leave of his intellectual faculties—far from it. Dante is no mystic in the sense we usually attach to the word. He does not take leave of his senses and reason in order that he may travel the ecstatic road to Heaven. Instead they have been sharp-

ened and perfected during the process of ascent. As he stands upon one of the highest circles, in the stars of his own constellation, he catches a glimpse of the whole universe, a survey as it were of the whole of life, and of the earth now so pitifully small in its distance; then ranges the growing splendors of the cosmic heavens; until all, large and small, falls into place, as a single whole governed by one law, and he knows the secret of life. As he rises from this vision, he passes into the secrets of religion, the mysteries of transformed and redeemed humanity, and the vision of Godhead itself. Thus and thus only is explained the complete relation of man to nature and the universe and to the spirit that gives all its being. This is the ultimate knowledge—unattainable by the device of the human reason unless assisted by the light of inspiration.

But were Dante's poem no more than the allegory of man's desire to attain to perfect freedom through perfect knowledge, there would be lacking precisely the thing whose absence mars the ideal of the perfect ascetic—the charm of personality quite apart from any symbolical value it may have in terms of philosophy or theology. The love story of Aucassin and Nicolette is beautiful, not because they stand for any abstract virtues or vices, but because they are vivid beings at war with a world that is not mindful of their love. Percival is a hero, not because he represents the ideal of the Middle Ages striving to free its soul from the snares of passion, but because his life is a pattern of strife and love and bewilderment like our own. Dante, too, saw life concretely, like the very great poet that he was; and his poem is the world's choicest because, though he never forgot his allegory, at every moment he transcends it.

Never is the greatness of Dante the poet so convincing as in his pictures of human degradation in Hell. To the

saint Hell is abhorrent. The painters of the Middle Ages have left us their ideas, curious grotesque things, these, with little sympathy for the victims in the flames, while the saints in bliss above look down with smiling complacency. But not so Dante. Hell to him is a terrible personal adventure. He cowers in terror, he weeps with sympathy, he is touched with horror at tragedy, he is struck almost into indignation at cosmic injustice. He can even be insulted by the shade of a relative whose death he had not avenged. And Dante feels the slight, though it is offered by a damned soul in the depths of Hell. When finally he has wearily made his way out, his face must be washed clean of the grime and tears by the fresh dews of the purgatorial morning.

For Hell is no safe journey, even though he has at his side the best equipped guide, the philosopher-poet Virgil, perfected human personality armed by every human virtue. Only by his repeated aid is he kept from falling a victim to the deadly danger about him. He faints in the boat of Charon as the infernal artillery blazes a welcome to the newly arrived damned.

"The tearful land gave forth a wind, which flashed,  
As does the lightning, with vermilion light,  
That overcame my senses utterly;  
And I, like one whom slumber seizes, fell."

Only by a word of advice is he in a moment of vacillating courage kept from the rout of those, the most wretched of all, the irresolute, who lacked the personality to be worthy either of Heaven or of Hell. Even to speak of these is an indignity. One may glance at them only and pass on.

Hell is a bewilderment, from the moment of entry

through the dark gate to the last effort, when clasping the sides of Satan himself, he must resume his way to the upper air and the stars.

“Here sighings and lamentings and deep cries  
 Of pain resounded through the starless air,  
 Whereat my tears began to flow at first.  
 Strange tongues and speeches horrible, the words  
 Of suffering, accents of rage, and voices  
 Both deep and hoarse, and with them sounds of hands,  
 United in a tumult, whirling on  
 Forever through that air of timeless gloom,  
 Like sand borne onward by the circling wind.”

“How I became then frozen and grew hoarse,  
 Ask me not, reader, for I write it not,  
 Because but little were all use of words.  
 I died not, nor did I remain alive;  
 Think for thyself now, if thou hast a grain  
 Of wit, what I became, deprived of both.”

But Hell is always human. Distorted, grotesque, mutilated though the spirits may be in their fearful departure from the “just way”, they never lose a certain compelling power, even an attractiveness. For it is not the sin that Dante is trying to describe here, or the punishment of sin, but the motives, the personality of the sinner. And because these motives are but perversions of virtue, they yet remain human though damnable. Sometimes it takes more than a small exercise of reason to keep oneself from overflowing with sympathy—

“Here pity lives when it is truly dead.”

These words by Virgil recalled Dante sharply to himself as he leaned over the parapet in the eighth circle and watched

the distorted sorcerers and diviners. But even Virgil was silent when Francesca told the age-old story.

"Love, that absolves from love no one beloved,  
Enamoured me so deeply of his charm,  
Thou seest even now it leaves me not.  
Love led us on to a united death."

Dante overpowered by the tale "fell as a dead body falls".

It is this sympathy that makes the *Divine Comedy* one of the most compellingly realistic studies of human personality in literature. And the figures we meet in Hell are dramatically the most interesting because they appeal most powerfully to one's sympathy. It is only rarely that the poet condemns. Even Farinata, the leader of the party that had so bitterly persecuted the poet, he makes admirable, as he raises himself from his fiery tomb, "as though Hell were to him in great despite". Fiercely he accosts the living visitor, and as fiercely the poet replies; but between them is the respect that is always due to honorable enemies. In the Hell of the Sodomites he meets his old master in poetry, Ser Brunetto Latini; and there where the living flakes of fire rain down on the burning sand, the poet bends in reverence as he holds the lost spirit in loving converse. In the doleful wood of the suicides, than which there is no more devastating scene in the *Comedy*, where the human form has been changed to leafless stocks in the ruinous forest, he lingers to weep the fate of Pier delle Vigne. He cannot speak and turns to Virgil:

"Do thou still question him  
Of what thou thinkst would satisfy my wish;  
For I could not, such pity fills my heart."

While down in the very depths under the very wings of the Master of Vice himself, in the Hell of the traitors to



their country, he encounters the most abysmally tragic person of all, the traitor Ugolino of Pisa.

" . . . I saw two so frozen in one hole,  
One head was to the other as a hood;  
And as one in his hunger bites his bread,  
So had the upper one set in his teeth  
There where the other's brain joined with his nape.

. . . . .

" 'O thou that showest by so bestial token  
Hatred of him whom thou dost eat,' said I,  
'Tell me wherefore, on condition such  
That if thou rightly do complain of him,  
I, knowing who ye are and what his sin,  
May yet requite thee for it, up on earth,  
If that, with which I speak, be not dried up.'

"Lifting his mouth up from his fell repast  
That sinner wiped it on the hair upon  
The head which he had at the back despoiled.  
Then he began:—"

Yet even this horror of cannibalism in Hell brings a story of tragic grief as moving as that of Francesca. Here is a man whose inhumanity is as revolting as poetry can ever reveal, yet it awakes only pity. He is a man more sinned against than sinning, and his last remorse had been for the lot of his sons who with him had suffered in the Hunger Tower.

"When now a little beam had made its way  
Into the woful prison and I caught  
My very aspect in four faces, then  
Both of my hands for grief I bit, and they,  
Thinking that I had done it through desire  
Of eating, suddenly rose up, and said:

'Father, much less will be our pain, if thou  
Wilt eat of us; it is thou didst clothe us with  
This wretched flesh, and do thou strip it off.'  
I calmed me then not to make them more sad,  
And that day and the next we all stayed dumb.  
Ah, why didst thou not open, thou hard earth?  
And after we had come to the fourth day  
At my feet Gaddo threw himself stretched out,  
Saying: 'My father, why dost thou not help me?'  
He died there; and as thou seest me, I saw  
The three fall one by one between the fifth  
And sixth days; whereupon I set myself,  
Already blind, to groping over each,  
And two days called them, after they were dead;  
Then fasting was more powerful than grief."

How vivid, too, are the pictures of the background of Hell. It is the harsh world of sense devoid of all the ideal of spirit or reason. Stark it is in its caricature of the human landscape of Earth. It is earth with every softer human grace absent, and deprived of the light and warmth of the sun. The vision of the landscape of the moon as it is revealed to us by the telescope, an evil nightmare that distorts and disqualifies all that is sweetly reasonable, such is Hell. Hell itself is a fitting background for the characters in Hell.

Into this picture of the grotesque and the ironical, Dante has crowded all the odds and ends of Pagan and Hebrew mythology—those unassimilated remainders of by-gone civilizations that medieval Christianity must recognize, but had no room for in its systems of philosophy or theology. Thus Hell becomes a cosmic junkshop of outworn demons and divinities, monsters and giants, as the medieval cathedral amid its aspiring columns and corbels and spires finds room for the grinning faces and distorted figures of gar-

goyles, human and animal. The medieval mind dwelt in a region peopled yet with the debris of older cults. We see these in its architecture, we see them better in the passage through Dante's Hell. Minos, the equitable judge of the lower world of the Greek, becomes here a terrifying figure:

"There Minos stands in horrid guise, and snarls;  
Examining the sins there at the entrance,  
Judges, and sends as he entwines himself."

Cerberus, the guardian dog of the Greek Hades, is here an unutterable monster:

"And Cerberus, a cruel and strange beast,  
From out his triple throat barks like a dog  
Over the people that are there submerged.  
His eyes are red, his beard is black with grease,  
His belly huge; his paws are armed with nails;  
He claws the spirits, bites and lacerates."

The wise Centaur Chiron who taught Achilles and sent him forth an accomplished warrior, here guards the violent in the boiling river of blood. But Dante's masterpiece in the grotesque is the spirit of Fraud, Geryon, on whose back Dante and Virgil must descend from the seventh to the eighth circle:

"And he, of Fraud the loathsome image, came  
Along, and landed there his head and bust,  
But on the bank he drew not up his tail.  
His face was as the face of a just man,  
Of such benignity its outward skin,  
And all his trunk besides was serpent-like.  
Two paws he had, covered with hair as far  
As to the arm-pits; back and breast and both  
His sides had painted on them knots and wheels."

And as an infernal climax stands the inert image of Satan himself, now impotent but ghastly in his revelation of the utter absence of spirit—the *Rex Inferni*, but a king only as in him is seen in the highest degree the loss of all that makes for life:

“He, of the realm of woe the emperor,  
    Stood from the middle of his breast above  
    The ice; and better with a giant I  
Compare, than do the giants with his arms;  
    See now of how great size that whole must be,  
    That with a part so fashioned is conformed.  
If he was beautiful as he is foul  
    And did against his Maker lift his brows,  
    It well befits that all grief come from him.”

In the presence of evil thus nakedly displayed, the poet himself is robbed of sense and motion.

Hell is the distillation of the grotesque and ironical. It is the symbol of the state of utter bondage where right reason and love have been denied and the earthly human being has sunk to its place, the nadir of the universe of spirit and light. It is the ironic counterpart of cosmic peace—a place of infernal rest but also of supernal dehumanizing torture. It is the emancipation of pure matter, the earthly at peace from the incitement of all spirit. Hell is the state of mind where the individual lives in opposition to the laws of the universe—it is the allegory of rebellion.

It is a little difficult to discover when the idea of Purgatory came to Europe. The idea is oriental; we meet it for the first time in great literature in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The Catholic church of the early centuries played with it, but it did not become orthodox doctrine until a later century. In many Protestants, the idea yet inspires something

of the resentment of the early reformers. But again, as in Hell, with Dante in Purgatory we are in a region only indifferently connected with the orthodox afterworld of the Catholic faith. Like Hell it is far more a state of mind that the poet is presenting to us than a fantastic mountain in an inaccessible region of the southern ocean.

Hell is the ironical counterpart of freedom and peace—a freedom sought through rebellion against the cosmic order, and a bondage achieved to which hope can no longer come. Purgatory is the active search for the true freedom through discipline and the discovery of the law of obedience. It is Dante's interpretation of the true significance of asceticism and the good life. Over the entrance to Hell the visitor reads the horrid summons to abandon hope; at sunrise in Purgatory, Casella, a newly arrived friend, sings Dante's own hymn of love and philosophy, "*Amor che nella mente mi ragiona.*" Hell was the place of exceeding gloom deepening to icy night; in Purgatory the day dawns and every step upward is guided by the circling sun. In Hell the music had been the "thunder of endless wailings"; here in every circle is heard the mingling of human voices in joyous prayer and hymns. Hell was bitter with resentments and blasphemies; in Purgatory the souls mingle in loving concourse and friendship grows with a sharing of one another's burdens. This is not the old ascetic idea of humanity at war with its baser self, but humanity joyously undergoing the discipline whereby alone it may become perfected. It is not a picture of the cloister, as a very famous critic has said, but an allegory of the active practical life. And rightly therefore it is the central poem in the trilogy.

And the allegory of mutual aid, that is Purgatory and friendship, is symbolized by the meetings of Virgil and

Sordello, and Virgil and Statius. The first two were drawn to each other in the beginning only by their birthplace, Mantua. But when the proud spirit who had been seated apart heard who his fellow townsman was, he "embraced him where the inferior lays hold". Statius, however, whom newly released from the circle of avarice the poets meet, introduces himself, then tells of his secret conversion to Christianity, his call to poetry, and his love for Virgil and his desire:

"Seed to my ardor were the sparks, that were  
So warm within me, of that flame divine  
From which more than a thousand take their fire;  
I speak of the *Aeneid*, which to me  
Was mother, and was nurse in poesy;  
Without it I had not a drachma's weight.  
And if I could have been alive on earth  
When Virgil lived, I would consent to owe  
A sun more than I do for my release."

Gladly, then, that he may not lose the loving companionship of one he may not hope to meet again, he stays his upward steps, keeping pace with the mortal guest, delaying by a night his entry into Heaven.

But Purgatory is not humanity without the penalty of pain. Dante is no optimist. Man is born a spirit rebellious against the best way. The process of discipline is the only means at hand to cure this inveterate habit of being drawn away from the path that both nature and reason would have man follow. To restore the power of both, this it is for which the seven circles of this region are planned. As in every school, the first steps are labored, and the scholar bends under the novel task, so here the poet has a severe task with his first steps, and needs the encouragement of his guide:

"Such is the Mount,  
That it is ever hard to climb below,  
And pains the less, the higher one ascends."

He is bewildered, like any newcomer, at the strangeness of the scene; but always there are many who are eager to lend their aid. There is pain, and plenty of it. For example, the envious sit huddled together with their eyelids sewed with fine wire:

"I do not think there goes on earth today  
A man so hard, compassion would not pierce  
At sight of that which later I beheld;  
For when I had approached so near to them,  
That what they did grew clear to me, the tears  
Flowed from my eyes for the great grief I felt.  
Coarse haircloth covered them, it seemed to me,  
And each one with his shoulder did support  
His neighbor, and the bank supported all.

. . . . .

As to the blind the sunlight profits not,  
So to these shades where I was speaking then,  
The light of heaven was not bountiful;  
For all their eyelids were pierced through with wire  
Of iron, and so stitched as men treat hawks,  
Because for wildness they abide not still."

The proud go bent chin to knees under heavy loads, as they pass along the ledge chanting their renunciation of the vice that divides humanity. The slothful, those in whom love had been weak, now spend their nights and days in a ceaseless race, encircling the mount and crying to encourage one another in the holy toil:

"We are so full of eagerness to move,  
We can not tarry; therefore, pray, forgive,  
If thou esteem this justice churlishness."

These all are learning the meaning of love, the active virtue that regulates appetite and cements society, and the lessons they learn are never easy.

As in the Hell, so here Dante gives us a glimpse of his own character. His first ascent is slow, the natural reluctance of a freedom-loving spirit to submit to the discipline. In the circle of the Proud he too goes bent as though under a heavy load; and he later confesses that after death his stay in this region will be long. Then finally, when six of the vices have been conquered, and only the cleansing of lust remains, he hesitates like a frightened child before the purifying flames of the fire, though his friends Virgil and Statius have gone before. He musters up his courage only when the magic name Beatrice is pronounced and her waiting welcome promised on the plateau above. But as he passes the fire so hot is it that he would have plunged into molten glass to cool himself. What confession is Dante making here?

And now the obstacles have all been passed, the angel guardians of the purgatorial regions have with mild sweep of a wing erased the symbol of bondage from the poet's brow, and he is on the last stage of his search. He has arrived at earthly perfection. Philosophy and science with their discipline have done their work, and their symbol, the tender and wise poet-friend, Virgil, now frees him from all control save of his own inner nature.

"Hither with wit I brought thee, and with art;  
Henceforth take thine own pleasure for thy guide;  
From the steep ways thou'rt free, and from the strait. . . .  
Await no more my words, nor sign from me,  
For free, upright, and sound thy judgment is;  
'Twere wrong to disobey its will, and hence  
Over thyself I crown and mitre thee."



We are in the earthly Paradise, the place where man can no longer will evil. He is ready now for the visitation of visitations, God's revelation of the higher truth, the love that binds the cosmic universe and moves the sun and every star. This is something that human science may reach by no process of logic or dialectic. It is the mystery behind all life and motion, the eternal value for whose complete revelation man is fitted only when his nature has been made perfect by the stern moral and intellectual discipline of true philosophy. Such is the meaning of Beatrice and the climax of the poem.

With perfect art the scene is managed. The pageant of the Medieval Church is displayed before us, and the truth of the relation of Church to State, both free, each in its realm. The Church for the preservation of man's soul, the State for the discipline of man's reason—the two cardinal means of man's salvation. In the midst of the procession, aloft in her perfect beauty, Dante sees the figure that from his ninth year has been his guiding star:

"So it was there within a cloud of flowers,  
Which then was rising from angelic hands,  
And falling back again, within, without,  
Appeared to me a Lady, olive-crowned  
Over a veil pure white, with mantle green,  
And robed in color of the vivid flame."

Who is Beatrice? The recent critics who see in her only the allegory of some secret heavenly dispensation no doubt are right, and as such she will be Dante's guide into the highest regions. Like Virgil she represents something that must, if the allegory keeps time, be represented by a human figure. But Virgil is something more than philosophy personified. Dante turns to him at the first meeting as to a personal friend:

"Honor and light of other poets, now  
May the long study and great love avail me,  
Which made me search thy volume; for thou art  
My Master and my Author; thou alone  
Art he from whom that fair style has been taken,  
Which has done honor to my name."

So also is Beatrice the eternal feminine—*das Ewig Weibliche*—which draws us upward. Who was she, what was her life, how far has the story in the *Vita Nuova* a real foundation in fact? These are questions whose answer, though interesting, have no great bearing on the poem. That man is indeed fortunate who, early or late in life, has caught somehow, somewhere, the hint of inspiration personified in some radiant feminine figure. It is not the real woman that is significant, but the ideal, and her influence. His Beatrice took Dante to the throne of God and the vision of the cosmic universe as one vast divine plan. Her smile was the most beautiful of Heaven's glories, until she must chide the poet: "Turn thou and listen, for not only in my eyes is Paradise."

This is Dante's manner of combining the ideal of the knight of romance and that of the saint. The Beatrice of the earth is also the Beatrice of the highest Heaven, just as earthly love is also the same love that radiates from the throne of the Empyrean; only it must never forget its perfect origin. For such as forget wilfully there is Hell, for a teaching of its purifying power the discipline of Purgatory. All this thought and more is symbolized by the Radiant Intelligence who now is to become the poet's guide and counsellor.

On even an early reading one is astonished at the convincing realism of Dante's Heavens. They are not rapt

visions, such as the religious mystics reveal to us, fantastic minglings of allegory and ecstasy, but downright revelations of definite states of mind and raise discussions of very practical earthly problems. As we go upward there must be certain very definite doubts and paradoxes resolved. In the Moon we are to see the importance of a fixed devotion to the law of love as against a wavering allegiance. In Mercury the utter importance of the true relation of the two great means of man's salvation, the complementary agencies of Church and State. In Venus we discuss the age-old question of the freedom of the human will in opposition to the determinism of a science, which, then as now, saw man as a cog in a cosmic machine. Thus we go upward, every new flight bringing new knowledge, new light, a more dazzling smile to the effulgent Beatrice, and a larger depth of harmony to the heavenly chorus.

There are pageants whose like the earthly imagination can only faintly conceive. The trinity of rainbows in the Sun, spirits of the blest, thus in their cosmic sweep foreshadowing the mystery of the Trinity. The cross spread in the celestial sky of Mars drawn by the soldiers of the Church, among whom Dante catches the glimpse of his own ancestor, the crusader Cacciaguida. The call for earthly justice in Jupiter that goes up from the saints who arrange themselves into the supernal motto, "*Deligite justitiam qui judicatis terram.*" "Seek justice ye who rule the earth"; then in a kaleidoscopic change these blend into an eagle from whose throat is pronounced the hymn of just empire.

Swiftly we pass from planet to planet, to stars, to the Primum Mobile, and the nine orders of angels spinning ceaselessly the music of the nine spheres of Heaven; then the Empyrean, the river of light and the vision of all

Paradise assembled in the rose of Heaven, where Dante catches the last smile of Beatrice:

"I raised up my eyes,  
And saw her as she made herself a crown,  
Reflecting from herself the eternal rays.  
From that place of the highest thundering  
No eye of mortal is so far removed,  
In whatsoever sea it deepest sinks,  
As was my vision there from Beatrice;  
But it was naught to me, her image so  
Came down to me unblurred by aught between."

Then finally the vision of visions, the sight of the secret of the Almighty Himself. All doubts here are cleared. The poet's eyes have been newly opened to the great truths of the universe. Here at last is the perfect knowledge. But it is not a mystery though it be supersensible. It is the last synthesis where all particulars become at once united.

"O Light Eternal, that alone abidest  
Within Thyself, knowing alone Thyself,  
Self-known and knowing, lovest and dost smile!  
That circle, which appeared to be in Thee  
As thou conceived as a reflected light,  
After my eyes somewhat had viewed it round,  
Within itself with color of its own  
Seemed to be painted with our image there."

This is not Heaven and God, as the mystic fancies them, but a vision of the Divine plan of the universe as a poet sees it in this life, possible to the imagination that is willing to put forth in no little bark. It is more—it is the ultimate knowledge, not a city of refuge to which spirits weary of the world's strife may flee, but a practical knowledge for the affairs of every day. Dante's greatness and value are nowhere more apparent than in this, that he seeks for a

meaning of life which shall have relation to all life's activities, practical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual. He has caught from the Oriental the significance of the spiritual life; but he refuses, unlike the Oriental, to regard the problems of this world with indifference. Like the Hebrew, he sees the utmost significance of the moral law and of obedience; but unlike the Hebrew, he refuses to be content with the thought of a transcendent deity whom the human intellect may not compass. Like the medieval ascetic, he feels the near thrill of ecstasy at the vision of Divine splendor; but unlike the ecstatic monk, he is convinced that somehow, somewhere, there is a manifestation of the same intelligent Deity in the daily affairs of even sinful man. In all this Dante remains in the full flow of the tradition of the best European thought since Homer. He is more universal than the Greek only in that he draws into the channel the best streams also of the Orient. He will not allow a wedge to be driven between man's spiritual life and his daily sojourn on earth.

Dante in thus combining with the Greek the various other traditions has done the great tradition a very great service, one that the modern world is slowly only beginning to appreciate. The Greek looked upon life objectively, and art for him was an imitation of life purged of all irrelevancies and made reasonable. In tragedy and in comedy, as well as in philosophy, he sought for a reasonable pattern as a norm of human conduct. The Oriental as the Hebrew, looking into the nature of spirit itself, saw life on all sides surrounded by an inexpressible infinity; so his art and his philosophy, when he turned to either, is an effort to read life as a poor substitute for the only abiding reality. Thus man and his ways become matters of indifference, and human conduct of value only when it

becomes obedient to the higher law. It was right that from the Orient Europe learned the doctrine of asceticism. And appropriately, also, from the Orient came the value of allegory, as a means of translating into sensible terms doctrines that have to do with supersensible relations. Allegory thus becomes a kind of metaphor by means of which one can talk of ineffable things in the speech of everyday life.

To Dante both the sensible and supersensible world have a real existence, and an ignoring of either is followed by a loss and very real danger to human nature. All Hell is filled with those whose knowledge was thus incomplete. The sensible and supersensible are different dimensions in which man lives. But the laws that obtain in both are not different but emanate from the same source, and are construed as different or contradictory only as they require different faculties of the human intellect. Thus we have in Dante a hierarchy of values, but nowhere a contradiction. The world of sense with its appetites; the world of society with its laws; the world of science and philosophy with its logic; the world of spirit with its aspirations. Each lower world is in a way the allegory for the one higher; and the good life, in all, is the goal of human achievement, freedom, and peace. It is thus that Dante discovers the great synthesis that shall reconcile all the conflicts that have made human tragedy. It is because his poem thus achieves the goal that he has entitled it the *Comedy*.

How many of our later problems does Dante thus anticipate? How near is he to the idea of the best of modern science? The physicist to-day sees behind the world of tangible sense another world of mathematical formulas that gives meaning and direction to that which is otherwise meaningless. We shall never see with our eyes or touch

with our hands the clusters of flying electrons into which even the most familiar objects dissolve as we contemplate them in the world of mathematics. Even our organs of sense and the brain that directs them in this region participate in their vertiginous dance. Yet we eat, sleep, and make love in the world of sense, and act by moral laws, as though the world of the physicist held true on the other side of the moon. But there is no contradiction here. The human reason that discovers the world of the physicist operates as remorselessly in the other; and we contradict its values with the same danger to ourselves and our moral integrity in either field. And the still more remote world of spirit and religion? The human conscience, even to-day, has never been able quite to shake itself free of its needs and values. What religion is and its place in life, this is a question that great literature has never been able to ignore. No, Dante is as modern in his values for life as the most modern; only he lived almost seven hundred years ago and was a pioneer, while we to-day reap the harvest of his efforts.

In his search for Peace and Freedom this Florentine explorer is no less daring in his exposition of man's relation to the social state. The world was smaller then, much smaller than to-day, but as now was divided into states with mutual rivalries and private feuds. Jealousies, commercial wars, race antipathies, in the year 1300 were not much different from the motives before the World War of 1914, or the seeds for future wars being sown to-day. Yet Dante confidently dreamed of a world federation and peace, and sets out to demonstrate its possibility and to describe the means whereby it may be achieved, for only through world peace may be secured also the highest good of the individual.

To Dante, living yet in the memory and the shadow of the Roman Empire and its centuries of order for Europe, the only hope lay in an unselfish super-government that would assure the peace and freedom necessary for the cultivation of man's unselfish nature. The evil that he saw in the world was due to usurped power, and the greed that prompted it. Suppress these by a higher tribunal to which all can reasonably submit their differences and all may yet be well in this distracted age.

"Wherefore man had need of a twofold directive power according to this twofold end, to wit, the supreme pontiff, to lead the human race, in accordance with things revealed, to eternal life; and the emperor, to direct the human race to temporal felicity in accordance with the teachings of philosophy."

One church, one empire. This for the Middle Ages, when the Church was arrogantly laying claim to temporal power. Dante's most vigorous denunciation is directed against the usurping Popes. In Hell he reads the simoniacal pope a lesson in clerical honesty; in Heaven Saint Peter thunders an accusation against the worldly-minded, usurping popes until all Heaven blazes with wrath. But the poet's words are translatable into the language of twentieth century statesmanship; had he been living in 1919 his hand would have written the constitution of the League of Nations, and Virgil, the poet-philosopher of the Roman Empire would again have been his inspiration and guide.





## X. THE DEATH OF ROMANCE

### I. A NEW WORLD

"That age shall come with the passing years  
When the bond of Ocean shall be loosed;  
A vast continent may be revealed; and Tethys  
Disclose new realms beyond the Ultima Thule."

SENECA.

MORE bonds were loosed than those of ocean, in the two centuries after Dante's death, and unsuspected realms disclosed. It was a tight little world the Middle Ages lived in. Dante speaks respectfully of the equator and of the Pillars of Hercules and the Ganges in India. Beyond these he allowed only his poetic imagination to wander and discovered the Mountain of Purgatory in the forbidden waters of the southern hemisphere. Suddenly in the closing years of the fifteenth century, incited by the new discovery of the mariner's compass—a crude affair this in the early days, a magnetized needle floating in a bowl of water—foolhardy sailors brought back with them to Europe the maps of Africa and the Americas. Almost overnight the world had more than doubled in size and added inexpressible treasures to the imagination.

Fired by the success of the sailor, the soldier set out on a new crusade to exploit these new discoveries and conquer realms for his sovereign, and name and glory and wealth for himself. Cortez, with a handful of crack-brained ad-

venturers like himself, destroys an empire in Mexico and with a gesture hands it over to his king; Pizzaro, not to be outdone, scales the Andes and brings the blessings of European civilization to the unappreciative Incas; and carries back with him the map and treasure of another empire to be added to the possessions of Castile. Soon every nation in Europe was awake to the new adventure; and he was an unimaginative lad indeed who could not in his day-dreams fancy himself leading home captive heathen princes and ballasting his ship with the silver and gold, and ivory and peacocks of regions Europe scant decades before had never dreamed of. The century after Columbus is the story of innumerable trading adventures, searches for the Northwest Passage, new colonization schemes, bitter conflicts over trade routes, new wealth and industry, and a new luxury and comfort in cities and homes. Incredible hardships, incredible dangers, but also as incredible rewards for the successful adventurer. At the beginning of the sixteenth century it looked as though Spain held all the honors, but before the century had come to a close, a little country to the north, up to then rarely mentioned with respect, was taking the odd trick. It was the adventurous sailor who laid the foundation of the future British Empire.

But there were other breakings of bonds that, though less picturesque at first, were in the end to be equally dramatic. The world had long played with wooden blocks for printing; but a curious German was the first to prove by example that books could be printed with movable type, and thus the long process of multiplying copies of a book was incredibly shortened. His Bible was printed about 1450; and before the century was over printing presses were everywhere, and books were coming out with

a speed and regularity that to-day astounds us, when we think of the yet crude hand presses the best of them were, books whose finish and typography we cannot but admire even in these days of mechanical ingenuity. But the startling effect of this new invention even the most sanguine in those days could not foresee. Learning which before was perforce confined to the few who could afford the luxury of a library, now became almost common property. The poor scholar of Chaucer longed for "forty books"—in another hundred years for the same price he could have bought over four hundred.

The result on literature was instantaneous. From being the pastime of those who could afford its luxury, it became the property of all. The poet instead of writing for the chosen few, his aristocratic patrons, now was to become the servant of a public only a very small fraction of whom he could ever hope to know personally. Such were the beginnings of a movement that carries down to our own times, a gradual widening of the reading public, and a growing interest on the part of the author in this larger taste he must seek to satisfy, that the more generous may be his reward. It is all a part of the new, but yet unsuspected, movement toward democracy.

But this is not all that took place in those centuries of transition. Another curious German, this time experimenting with chemicals, discovered a mixture that when fired blew part of his apparatus out through the roof. The accident had doubtless happened before, as it has happened since in modern laboratories. But this man was a German and sat down to think it all over. The result was the musket—a useful device, though at the time considered highly unethical by the knight on horseback. The noise frightened his horse, and the ball did now and then

hit the warrior and could penetrate even the best armor. Chivalry did not surrender at once. The knight for some time to come still wore his armor and made his brave show with horse and lance and pennon; but his days were numbered. If a mere private with this new utensil was more than a match for a duke armed and on horseback, then so much the worse for the duke. Gradually the private learned his lesson, as less gradually also did the noble. The social results of the chemist's accident were in time to be somewhat considerable.

History has played with the results of these three discoveries until the world to-day is more startlingly different from the world of Dante than his was from that of Moses. But these are not yet all of the bonds whose loosening set imaginations a-tingle with new ideas. The nations of Europe were awakening to recognize themselves as nations. The various new languages were beginning to crystallize and think of themselves as able to maintain a literary tradition quite as effective as the old Latin and Greek. To be sure there was a tremendous revival of interest in the classics, and scholars began to read and write in the old languages with a facility that a Roman citizen of the days of Augustus might have envied, or been surprised at. And it is true that some great geniuses like Erasmus and poets like Politian have left us admirable things in Latin and Greek. But the new interest in the old was chiefly utilized to promote a larger and wiser loquacity in the ripening vernaculars; and the ideas that poets and historians and philosophers found themselves chiefly concerned with had not a little to do with strengthening the newly awakened interest in nationality.

The result of all these new stirrings was a reawakening of interest in man and this new world in which he lives.

Even at its best the poet of the Middle Ages felt that this life was a preparation for the more serious life to come, or that the visible world was a material allegory of the more real and more significant world of spirit. So medieval art is always trying to say something that can never quite get itself said in the lines and colors of the painting or in the clustered spires and massed figures of a church. A painter may do the whole panorama of the Last Judgment, but we know perfectly that it is not a piece of realistic portraiture that he is attempting to give us, but a state of mind. And in the massed and grotesque heterogeneousness of a medieval Gothic cathedral we have the allegory of the grotesque irrelevance of life itself, and also its aspiration. But the painter as the architect of this new period sees the surface of things far more clearly, and paints or writes what he sees with the effort to preserve some congruity with the real and the reasonable. Note the best work of such painters as Leonardo, or Raphael, or Michelangelo, to see how more and more they are drawn to subjects that have a lesser and lesser connection with the mysteries and allegories of religion, and their pictures become more and more portraits of idealized human beings and of the flow of human life.

Human institutions come in for a more careful study by the philosophers, as does the human form by the artists. Dante, as we saw, was almost alone in his generation as a political thinker; but his arguments for the state never go much farther than to discover some means of securing a federation of all states in the Empire, for the purpose of securing peace and order and right living for the individual. In other words, he thinks of the state as a righteous and wise policeman and educator. But now the idea of one empire is definitely abandoned, and in its place we have the

mutual jealousies of the multitude of nationalities that are just beginning to try their wings and claws. What is the ideal for the state, what the best constitution, what the source of law, and what the difference between wise and unwise legislation? These are practical questions, fundamental for human welfare. And as the Greeks had gone at these problems in the day when the Greek states were struggling to maintain themselves against odds, so now all Europe is greedily listening to the political philosopher. The prince of them all was the brilliant Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli, a man whose place in political thought is as secure as that of Plato or Aristotle. There was also Sir Thomas More, the Englishman, whose *Utopia* has given the language a new word, and benevolent thinkers a battle cry. Parallel to this interest in man and the state, was the growing interest in nature. This is no place to attempt even a summary of the new ideas that so quickly transformed the whole attitude of man toward the world he lived in. It is almost safe to say that from the time of the Greeks to the sixteenth century there had been practically no advance in man's knowledge of the world he lived in. Now in a scant hundred years we have the new beginnings of the sciences that to-day are our obsession. But the effect of this objectivity of the scientific mind is going to have an influence upon the tradition of letters that has grown steadily until now we wonder whether, as was the dream of Dante, some new synthesis of science and poetry may not be possible in the future.

It is interesting, too, to see in the so-called Reformation the same spirit of Europe breaking its bonds and seeking a new series of values. Revolt against the established church there had always been. The Albigensian heresy, that drenched Southern France with blood in the thirteenth

century, and almost destroyed the beauties of Provençal culture and poetry, was but one incident in a long period of unrest. Dante is full of threats against the papal regime, as it was then defined. Luther's outburst was only the latest word in a process that had been long preparing, and found Europe ready. It was not primarily a theological reform at all, though finally there were some shifts in theological dogma, and some new definitions on both sides. Far rather it was the culmination of an ethical revolt against an institution that had grown wealthy and corrupt. In reality, as much as anything else, it was an effort to translate the religious life into a code of manners reasonable for this world, avoiding so far as possible the emphasis on the life to come. And for matters of faith and the dogmas of theology, an appeal again to the experience of the individual and his reason. In this last, again, there is the characteristic trait of the new age: the desire to be objective and practical and to suit the growing needs of a rapidly changing society.

But for all this new freedom the new age was to pay a terrible price. The world to the ancients as well as to Dante was a clearly defined region with man well established as its central jewel. The earth was the center, the glory of the heavens and the revolving stars was its ornament and reward. Man was God's chiefest treasure; it was for his edification and final abode that all these splendors were spread forth. Even in ancient Greece the gods on Olympus had no higher or more valuable pastime than to play the interested spectator of the human drama. And Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a human cosmic play with scenery from the abyss of Hell to the throne of God. Man's reason may be imperfect, there may be the necessity of grace to prevent the play's going the sinister road to

damnation; but man's dignity is left unassailed by any thought of his unworthiness for the part. But suddenly with this breaking of bonds and the discovery of new worlds there came to man the large discomfort of man's insignificance. In a very few decades a new astronomy will reveal the painful fact that the earth, far from being the center of the cosmic stage, set for the spectacle of the tragedy or comedy of man, is only a pitifully small fragment of irrelevant matter astray in an abyss of immeasurable space. Confident as the new science became in its new weapon of human reason, its findings in all directions, instead of confirming man's faith in his ultimate superiority and divine mission, confirmed only his growing knowledge of his own limitations. A world cosmically so vast, a human society so multitudinous and so various and complex, a human nature so incalculable and at times so unreasonable—all this newly dawning knowledge seemed to leave man helpless in a world he had once fancied made, like the Garden of Eden, only for his trial and edification. Such thoughts bring the pangs of disillusionment.

But they have also their compensations. Though the note of pessimism is going to be heard over and over again, like a minor melody, in all the poetry and literature of this new age, a refrain utterly unlike anything in the exultant and confident Middle Ages, yet it will be something as far removed from the pious despair of the Hebrew as from the anxious search for the anodyne of intoxication of the Epicurean Omar Khayyam. Though now and then the minatory prophet may bid the careless to mend their ways, and point to the story of Doctor Faustus for the allegory of those who would know more than the divine plan holds good for man's eternal welfare, science will still go ahead in its resolute search, even at the cost of disillusionment.



The new science will not be rebuked into shame by the charge of impiety. And though a poet will now and then sing the joys of the present and the uncertainties of the future,—

“Gather ye rose-buds while ye may.

Old Time is still a-flying.

And this same flower that smiles today

To-morrow will be dying,”—

the new age will yet maintain that life is a serious business, and the science of life a study worthy of man's highest endeavor.

It will, however, wear its seriousness with a difference. The Middle Ages made the resolute effort to see life in the perspective of the eternal. Its world was small and to it life was a brief episode in a drama that had all infinity for its plot and denouement. It could know neither tragedy nor comedy, as the next age was to know them, for the clue to such an understanding could lie only in the all-knowing mind of Deity itself. Even to Dante, except in his greatest moments, life on this earth is but the allegory, simplified for an elementary human understanding, of eternal truth that even angels may never completely comprehend. But that there was a truth, final and complete and all embracing, the secret of the divine plan for the universe, the great medieval poet never doubted; and his *Divine Comedy* is his confident declaration of faith. But now, of a sudden almost, the world of the here and now, this universe of atoms and stars and the affairs of man, expanded until it became an affair of infinite complexity itself. To read its pattern and to know the secret wards and springs of its motions became man's inexpressible desire, and yet hopelessly beyond his attainment. It is the story of the eternal dissatisfaction of Doctor Faustus. To be

part of an infinite universe, to long to know its secrets, and to be forever thrust back against the bars of man's limitations, but resolutely to explore these so that man can in himself and in the fragment of the world that he can compass, read some wisdom that shall be a guide to life—all this becomes the strong motive that guides the ideas of this new group of humanists.

They will have much in common with the older humanists of ancient Greece; but they will have also other disturbing ideas that will forbid their ever quite attaining the serenity of Plato or Sophocles or Homer. We shall miss the visions and ecstasies of saints, we shall regret perhaps yet more keenly the absence of romance that always somehow gains for the hero his confident reward. We shall regret above all that glorious faith in a perfected humanity made in the image of God. But we shall also be the gainers in that we shall learn to know more about man and his ways. After the lapse of more than a millenium we shall again be in a universe that is all human; we shall, armed with human reason, attempt an exploration of its complexities; and though we shall over and over again see the picture of human insufficiency even for the attainment of human ends, the tragedy will be worth the effort. Or we shall have the picture of human insufficiency thrown as a grotesque caricature against a background of romantic ideals and learn the purifying laughter of sheer comedy. Or we shall read the thought of the man of the world who by long study has learned man's limitations, as he resolutely sets them forth in pages of incomparable wisdom. It is the age of three great contemporaries—men who challenge the supremacy of ancient Greece—Shakespeare, the Englishman, who dared to explore the depth of tragedy; Cervantes, the Spaniard, whose

laughter at human frailty is the purest and least tinged with bitterness: and Montaigne, the Frenchman, whose insight into human nature is still incomparable, and yet whose imperturbable good nature rarely breaks into satire. These are the giants of this new world.

## II. DON QUIXOTE

"The most artful part in a play is the fool's, and therefore a fool must not pretend to write it." *Don Quixote*.

"'In all this,' replied Don Quixote, 'I must inform thee, friend Sancho, that there is no remembrance which time will not deface, nor no pain to which death will not put a period.' 'Thank you for nothing!' Quoth Sancho." *Don Quixote*.

There is a story in the Hebrew Scriptures of a young farmer's son who went forth to look for his father's strayed asses and discovered instead a kingdom. But a more startling adventure than that of Saul, son of Kish, was that of Cervantes, the poor maimed Spanish soldier, who sat down to write a vulgar parody of courtly romance, only for the world later to discover in him the king of all prose fiction. Never was there an author more startlingly unpromising for a great task, never was a theme so utterly at variance with all the rules and standards that literature had held sacred; and yet never from the day when *Don Quixote* first appeared have the hearts of readers, great and small, wise and foolish, wavered in loyal allegiance. One can speak respectfully of Shakespeare or Sophocles or Dante, and yet fail to read him, as one can profit from the near presence of a great cathedral and yet not worship therein; but who does not know at least five of the glorious adventures of the immortal Don and his ubiquitous squire Sancho, and love them for their wise absurdities? These are things that go deep into the intimacies of men's bosoms,

and yet withal have a seriousness that even tragedy cannot surpass. You come to mock, but you stay to pray; and this is as it should be, with all wise comedy.

The life of Cervantes was sordid enough and to spare; there was in it apparently none of the austere poverty, clad in rags of wisdom, of the young Doctor Johnson, none of the generous folly of the young Doctor Goldsmith. For through the aberrations of each of these geniuses one can trace the set path of literary ambition beset with uncompromising toil. But the days of the Spaniard seen superficially were devoted to no other purpose than to make a spare living, or given to the hardships of a soldier of fortune. He of all men has about him the least of the author, and none of the author whose words will bear repeating. He was the son of a barber-surgeon, when barbers and surgeons were one, and neither craft respected. His education was at best far from academic. He became early a soldier and fought in the glorious battle of Lepanto (1571) where he was maimed in the good cause. He never forgot this his one good deed, but his country had a multitude of maimed veterans of a multitude of wars, and so far as we know his claims, when he presented them, were ignored. He was for years a captive slave in Algiers, and beggared his friends to gain his freedom. He took up writing because he had one good hand yet left, and the new literature called. It was not long before he became a somebody in the little world of letters, but who would have suspected that in his long knocking about the world and his varied efforts to pick up a living he had managed to pick up also the secret life of a Don Quixote and a Sancho Panza? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I suppose I ought for the sake of scholarship to mention Cervante's plays and his *Exemplary Novels*. They have their admirers, especially

Nor were these ill-assorted characters any more promising of literary fame than their patron. The weazened and toothless hero on a swaybacked, flea-bitten charger, fancying himself a hero of romance when he should have been in slippers and dressing gown before a fire; the dwarfed, pot-bellied, hungry peasant, at home only with his hogs and manure, convinced against his will that he was a squire and ruler of an island—these things have an odd flavor when one thinks of the heroes of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or Spenser's *Faerie Queene* or Ariosto's *Orlando*. You can't make romance of such stuff—Boileau said it with conviction some years later, "One is bored by the exploits of a vulgar hero." And Don Quixote and Sancho are vulgar. Read the amazing adventures of the windmills and the wine sacks. Be nauseated by the unsavory picture of Sancho's gluttony at the wedding of Camacho. The author does not spare one even the revolting intimacies of amorous inn wenches; and the breath of the lady Dulcinea del Toboso is redolent of garlic and onions. Realism never did better in exploiting the irrelevant and dilating upon the unheroic. But the story is neither irrelevant, commonplace, nor vulgar; and the heroes rise from the clay challenging comparison for very greatness with the great ones of antiquity. How came the miracle to pass?

The very newness of the thing is startling. Spain had given us many rogue stories before—*Celestina*, the story of a drab adventuress, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the boyish grandfather of Ruy Blas, Figaro, and the host of other literary rogues whose careers are united in the memoirs of the irrepressible Casanova. Comedy too had done its

these latter. But these are not closer than half-brothers to *Don Quixote*; and the literary tradition has seen fit to ignore them. In any case it is not as an article for an encyclopedia that I have designed this chapter.

turn with the sparkingly disreputable, in Ariosto and Machiavelli and above all in the incomparably sacrilegious Aretino. But where all these had been clever, or daring, or realistic, they had been nothing more; they fail to arouse the imagination of the reader, and the world would be not much the poorer had they never lived their precarious lives. Their rags and billingsgate are only picturesque; with Sancho they are a patent of nobility. And the ludicrous seriousness of the Don though it may never hope to attain the accolade of romantic knighthood, wins something far more precious in the glorious company of saints and apostles. And all this is sufficiently strange. Cervantes is a realist, interested in the life about him, and no more, writing to create a story that might amuse by adventures impossible in their grotesqueness, with apparently not the remotest interest in any creed or dogma, not an idea of being moral and edifying, yet he has given us something that turns the startled laugh into serious questioning. He plans a caricature and creates a finished personality, almost a saint. He abstains too from the all too common resort of realism to indecency. Misplaced as they may be, and this is the whole point of the story, Don Quixote has the ideals of a Galahad. He is as fine in thought and would be in deed as the hero of the *Divine Comedy*. Though he may have caused a jail delivery of sharpers, ruffians, and outlaws, his response to their baseness is always that of the gentleman without fear and without reproach. You can laugh at the incongruity, but you cannot but respect the misplaced hero.

"You see, gentlemen, what I have done for your sakes, and you cannot but be sensible how highly you are obliged to me. Now all the recompense I require is only, that every one of you, loaded with that chain from which I have freed your necks, do instantly repair to the city of Toboso; and there, presenting yourselves before the Lady Dulcinea del Toboso,

tell her, that her faithful votary, the Knight of the Woeful Countenance, commanded you to wait on her, and assure her of his profound veneration."

And Sancho, gross though be his nature and unattractive his appearance, is saved from the indecent by his peasant honesty. He is ever morally and intellectually downright, though his manners were never much higher than his rustic cottage. He through his life has been disciplined to take the world with the least emotional disturbance, and though severely tried on more than one occasion he runs true to kind. To the blandishments of the duchess he remains still the honest-spoken workman.

" 'Well,' said the Duchess, 'let us have no more of that; let Donna Rodriguez hold her tongue, and Signior Sancho Panza go to his repose, and leave me to take care of his Dapple's good entertainment; for since I find him to be one of Sancho's moveables, I will place him in my esteem above the apple of my eye.' 'Place him in the stable, my good lady,' replied Sancho, 'that is as much as he deserves; neither he nor I are worthy of being placed a minute of an hour where you said; Odsbods!'"

Sancho is coarse, down on all fours often, but never indelicate, his peasant honesty has no time nor taste for it.

It is the obvious thing to say that *Don Quixote* is a burlesque of the old tales of chivalry; that the imaginations of men and women had grown a bit stale over the impossible heroes of romance and the still more impossible stories of dragons and giants, of flying horses and demons, of strange lands and fairies of supernal beauty or witches of baleful complexion and power. Even at its best, as in the long cantos of Spenser or Ariosto, the thing begins to arouse resentment, and one wishes the known odors of commonplace reality in place of the perfume of etherealized poetry. One can't live in dreams always, even if the dreams are of perfect knights and ladies and the glorious appurtenances of

exalted chivalry. And when the chivalric tale is poorly told by an inferior poet—. The new age was interested in fact, and fact itself was romantic enough at times, Heaven knows. Columbus was no Amadis, but he conquered more, he and his successors, for the glory of the Spanish crown than the whole crew of medieval chivalry aided by all the magic of flying steeds, enchanted castles, and supernal weapons. A Don Juan of Austria, who defeated the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto and cleared the seas for a time of corsairs, was surely worth more to Christendom than even the mythical Orlando, glorious as was his death in the pass of Roncesvalles. The new imagination had learned to look on the world as fact and had learned also that fact could be as romantic as the best of fiction. Cervantes taught them also to laugh at romantic fiction; and his laughter still echoes across the centuries. For when fact and fiction collide, it is always the worse for poor fiction.

The book begins then as a gorgeous burlesque of romantic fiction. There have been such attempts by the score, but here the author is a genius and does something more than to make romance look paltry and ridiculous. This was done excellently well by Butler in his *Hudibras*, to name only one example. Cervantes on the contrary brings the two worlds of fact and romance into the same picture; you check romantic imagination by sordid fact; and you glorify the commonplace by inspiring it with the ideal—not an easy task this—and yet preserve something that is worth our admiration. It is this double power that makes this book of droll adventures also a mine of genial wisdom and cordial edification. Hence we must not take his *Preface* too seriously; it tells only half and the obvious half of the truth.



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"Let mirth and humour be your superficial design, though laid on a solid foundation, to challenge attention from the ignorant, and admiration from the judicious; to secure your work from the contempt of the graver sort, and deserve the praises of men of sense; keeping your eye still fixed on the principal end of your project, the fall and destruction of that monstrous heap of ill-contrived romances, which, though abhorred by many, have so strangely infatuated the greater part of mankind. Mind this, and your business is done."

The old romance had dwelt constantly in the presence of the ideal. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (the *Mad Roland*), for example, had been the fanciful account of fanciful wars between the Saracens of Spain and the paladins of the Emperor Charles the Great. There is probably a faint historical justification for some of the characters and even for some of the events; but everything has been so diluted by the fervent poetic imagination of the ages of chivalry, and the world one enters when one begins the poem is so hopelessly foreign to that of every day fact, that, were it not for the essential nobility of the characters, or their ignobility, and the magic of Ariosto's poetry, an errant reader might easily from this poem gain a set of utterly misleading values for life. This danger is always just around the corner in all extravagant romance. The age of chivalry, in its protest against the drab uniformity of life and its ugliness, was always seeking for compensation in an exaggerated code of refined manners and in as exaggerated a world of ideal adventure. For such literature it requires no small gift of poetic power to play with the ideal and yet remain convincingly human. Tasso did it in his *Jerusalem Delivered* and so did Ariosto and likewise Spenser. But the lesser authors, the little purveyors to mediocre appetites—the literary world was beset with impossible romances whose names now fortunately are oblivion. The

catalogue of the books in the library of Don Quixote, the books that turned his head and finally sent him forth on his fantastic career, these are of interest to-day only as the fallen tombstones in a forgotten cemetery.

But in the time of Cervantes the popular imagination dwelt long and lovingly with these popular heroes. Even Saint Theresa tells how as a girl she had been beguiled by an insatiable delight in their adventures. And Cervantes who had faced foes on the battle field now faced a much more difficult foe, a public taste, and the weapon he selected was not the wrath of the austere prophet but the refined laughter of the man of the world. He would make romance ridiculous by showing how poor a figure it cut when dragged out into the sunlight and made to take the dust on the July highways of Spain. So he begins:

"The first thing he did was to scour a suit of armour that had belonged to his great-grandfather, and had lain time out of mind carelessly rusting in a corner. . . .

". . . The next moment he went to view his horse, whose bones stuck out like the corners of a Spanish Real. . . . He was four days considering what name to give him; for, as he argued with himself, there was no reason that a horse bestrid by so famous a knight, and withal so excellent in himself, should not be distinguished by a particular name. . . . And thus after many names which he devised, rejected, changed, liked, disliked, and pitched upon again, he concluded to call him Rozinante; a name, in his opinion, lofty sounding, and significant of what he had been before, and also of what he was now; in a word, a horse before or above all the vulgar breed of horses in the world. . . .

"And now, his armour being scoured, his head-piece improved to a helmet, his horse and himself new-named, he perceived he wanted nothing but a lady, on whom he might bestow the empire of his heart; for he was sensible that a knight-errant without a mistress was a tree without either fruit or leaves, and a body without a soul. . . . Near the place where he lived dwelt a good likely country lass, for whom he had formerly had a sort of an inclination, though it is believed she never heard of it, nor

regarded it in the least. Her name was Aldonza Lorenzo, and this was she whom he thought he might entitle to the sovereignty of his heart: upon which he studied to find her out a new name, that might have some affinity with her old one, and yet at the same time sound somewhat like that of a princess, or lady of quality: so at last he resolved to call her Dulcinea, with the addition of del Toboso, from the place where she was born; a name, in his opinion, sweet, harmonious, extraordinary, and no less significative than the others which he had devised. . . .

"So one morning before day, in the greatest heat of July, without acquainting any one with his design, with all the secrecy imaginable, he armed himself *cap-à-pie*, laced on his ill-contrived helmet, braced on his target, grasped his lance, mounted Rozinante, and at the private door of his backyard sallied out into the fields, wonderfully pleased to see with how much ease he had succeeded in the beginning of his enterprise."

All this and what immediately follows in the *First Part* of the novel is excellent burlesque; the hand of a master is evident who can point a fact as unerringly as he pointed his sword. But it is only the externals of the story that have caught his interest. The excellent picture of the Don's all-night vigil over his arms, the mystery of the accolade of knighthood granted him by a humorous innkeeper, the girding on of his sword by the laughing wenches, and his first adventures, those with the boy and the merchants, his final discomfiture and undignified return, all this is excellent burlesque. The heat of July was too strong for the poor errant-knight's head, as it was also for the idea of romance, which lives but in twilight. Adventures such as these, however, become monotonous; something more is needed if the book is to grow to adult stature.

The technique is perfect. There is every detail that in the twilight of poetry would yield romance, but here in the blazing sun of fact shows only comedy. For in spite of his conviction, in spite of his most resolute will and downright honesty, in spite of his uncompromising ideal, every fact

"'Mercy on me!' cried Sancho, 'did I not give your worship fair warning? did not I tell you they were wind-mills, and that nobody could think otherwise, unless he had also wind-mills in his head?' 'Peace, friend Sancho,' replied Don Quixote: 'there is nothing so subject to the inconstancy of fortune as war. I am verily persuaded, that cursed necromancer Freston, who carried away my study and books, has transformed these giants into wind-mills, to deprive me of the honour of the victory; such is his inveterate malice against me; but, in the end, all his pernicious wiles and stratagems shall prove ineffectual against the prevailing edge of my sword.' 'Amen, say I,' replied Sancho."

Never was the difference between the view of the hopeless idealist and the equally hopeless realist more adequately set forth. To the one a barber's basin is always a barber's basin, be its polish never so golden in the sunlight; to the other though it may look like a barber's basin, and be put to the base use of preparing peasants' faces for the razor, it yet remains the helmet of the fabled Mambrino. You may kill but you cannot cure such fanatical idealism.

But though the ideal may cut a sorry figure in contrast with the coarseness of the real, the knight never loses faith in the sacredness of his cause or the power of his virtuous right arm. When he goes down before his foes, and he sees the ridiculousness of their real faces, he calls it sorcery and lets it go at that. The same thing has been done in slightly different words by idealists in our own time. When Sancho in desperation sets before him the three bouncing village wenches, redolent of garlic and billingsgate, and Don Quixote falls before the one least unavailable in an agony of adoration, he prays that his eyes may be opened, that he may penetrate behind the witchcraft that has ensnared her to behold the supernal glory of his lady in its true features. The prayer is not unlike Dante's when on the heights of the Earthly Paradise

he beholds the veiled figure of his beloved Beatrice. There is pathos in this, as well as comedy; the burlesque has a thin shell that breaks as one looks at it closely, so fine has the character of the knight become, and so great his faith in his ideal.

“ ‘O! thou extremity of all that is valuable, masterpiece of all human perfection, and only comfort of his afflicted heart, thy adorer; though now a spiteful enchanter persecutes me, and fascinates my sight, hiding with mists and cataracts from me, and me alone, those peerless beauties under the foul disguise of rustic deformity, if he has not transformed thy faithful Knight into some ugly shape to make me loathsome to thy sight, look on me with a smiling amorous eye; and in the submission and genuflexion which I pay to thy beauty, even under the fatal cloud that obscures it, read the humility with which my soul adores thee.’ ‘Tittle-tattle,’ quoth the country wench, ‘spare your breath to cool your porridge, and rid me of your idle gibberish.’ ”

Dante's Beatrice was an ideal, attainable in moments of rapt vision, as real as the world he saw in the *Divine Comedy*: he saw her face to face, conversed with her, and to him was thus granted the higher knowledge without which life would be a meaningless puzzle. But Don Quixote's Lady Dulcinea del Toboso remained a mere wraith, and when he saw in the flesh the thing to whom he had given her name, he was shocked at the contrast, but he refused to believe that his faith had been false or his ideal humanly unattainable. It was the same faith that maintained him in the worst of his trials. Though he may suffer the worst ignominy, his mission is always sacred, and though his largest accomplishment may be but the routing of a band of mourners about a corpse or the flight of the barber from whom he filches the helmet, his deeds to him are as worthy as those of Amadis of Gaul. Here is a faith stronger than that of the Middle Ages, for it is based alone

somehow got itself into precisely the place it should occupy in great literature, not an end but a means to an end much higher. Hence it is that from something quite external the interest of the author, and of the reader, is drawn more and more to what is purely internal. The golden age of chivalry, the beauty of a perfect world and a perfect society, these things that Don Quixote discourses upon with such eloquence and which contrast so grotesquely with the equipment with which he sets out alone to achieve them—these things become the external framework of the author's design. Superficially then, by a gesture of derision romantic ideals are pushed into the limbo of outgrown and useless toys that a world now grown up and mature may well afford to laugh at with worldly-wise contempt. But to see the novel thus as only a protest against useless chivalry is to see only its obvious half, for in the characters of both our heroes the mistaken ideals have a way of discovering larger compensations. Out of the mess of misdirected effort and misadventure we begin to discover character and lofty personality. Though as practical persons the Don would have done well to have stayed at home and the squire to have cultivated his hogs and cabbages, as impractical persons they went forth to assault the world; they brought to themselves much pain, and ridicule, but also much wisdom, and above all won character. This thought with which *Part I* closes becomes the central theme of *Part II*.

The new story told in the new manner became instantly popular. Statistics are available which tell of the number of chivalric romances that were published before and after *Don Quixote* first appeared. The fall in the romantic barometer was instant and appalling. The book got itself

into numerous editions, and before long translations were carrying it, where it belonged, to the entire world. In other words it became a best seller; and as a result there were imitations. To kill one exceptionally bold one that professed itself a sequel Cervantes wrote *Part II*. To save them from the literary pirate the author must tell of the last adventures of the Don and his squire, and painlessly put the heroic idealist to death. But in the years that elapsed before he began the sequel he lived lovingly with his creations; under the spell of their own genius the two characters grew in depth and sympathy. Their pains of *Part I* and their grotesqueness now on this second journey in large part disappear, and in their place comes a deeper wisdom in the meaning of life. There are those who prefer the frank farce and satire of the earlier work, yet somehow this later clings more lovingly to the heart.

The knight is going to lose much of his purely farcical character, and in return show a whimsicality wholly lovable; at times we shall think of him as a child over whom a tender providence presides to save him from his errors. The squire is going to receive a polish and a discretion and a larger gift of proverbial utterance; experience has disciplined him and given him a homely philosophy, conversation has given him manners, he is almost polite. Their dialogues will touch all subjects from literary criticism to love and knight-errantry, and save in the last will have a significance wholly unsuspected and as wholly memorable. In other words the characters have developed a richer personality. The contrast between poetry and prose yet remains, and as always the line between them is not quite definable; the knight is as romantic as ever and as mad on his favorite theme; the squire is as impervious as ever to the romantic thrill; but between these extremes there



will be many regions they can explore with affectionate companionship, to our edification.

The adventures no longer ring changes on the knight's frailty and the squire's ability to receive blows. They will be neatly selected instead to exhibit the various aspects of the heroes' characters. Take the adventure with Death. The two shortly after their setting out have come upon a band of strolling players yet in costume. They are retailing an old mystery play from village to village, and their curious appearance is alarming. The outcome is not all that it might have been, for Death was a merry wag and unhorsed the knight and stampeded Dapple. But Sancho's wisdom prevents further indignity, and leads to a final dialogue.

" 'Ah, but,' says Sancho, 'your strolling emperor's crowns and sceptres are not of pure gold, but tinsel and copper.' 'I grant it,' said Don Quixote; 'nor is it fit the decorations of the stage should be real, but rather imitations, and the resemblance of realities, as the plays themselves must be. . . . Prithee tell me, hast thou never seen a play acted, where kings, emperors, prelates, knights, ladies, and other characters, are introduced on the stage? One acts a ruffian, another a soldier; this man a cheat, and that a merchant; one plays a designing fool, and another a foolish lover: but the play done, and the actors undressed, they are all equal, and as they were before.' 'All this I have seen,' quoth Sancho. 'Just such a comedy,' said Don Quixote, 'is acted on the great stage of the world, where some play the emperors, others the prelates, and, in short, all the parts can be brought into a dramatic piece; till death, which is the catastrophe, and end of the action, strips the actors of all their marks of distinction, and levels their quality in the grave.' "

These pearls are unexpected. In *Hamlet* or in *As You Like It*, the stage is set for them and the characters drilled in their parts; here the chance musings by the way seem an inspiration. But they ring true.

Or take the desperate adventure with the lions. They

come upon a man convoying two cages of lions belonging to the king. The knight is curious; the keeper is courteous; the lions are large and fierce. Here is the opportunity of opportunities to vindicate his courage—the thing is real enough to the eye, even Sancho cannot call them sheep. On the contrary the squire is a picture of abject terror. Against the entreaties of the keeper, in spite of the wild flight of his friend and the driver, in the face of a world that must admire and acknowledge, he forces the cage door to be opened while he stands in the approved posture, a knight facing death unafraid.

This is not wholly farcical—it might have been deadly—the spare knight and his weak weapons against the savage beast. That the lion yawned and turned to the knight his hinder parts was not on the program as Don Quixote had planned it, but it saved his life and the rest of a good story. He had shown that rarest of things, real courage, though its manner was hardly orthodox. He had vindicated knight-errantry in a world given over to discretion, and you love him for his folly. And the conversation that follows is only to show us that a man may be a fool and yet possess exceeding great wisdom.

“What a noble figure makes the knight, who before the ladies, at a harmless tournament, comes prancing through the lists enclosed in shining steel; or those court champions, who in exercises of martial kind, or that at least are such in appearance, show their activity: and though all they do is nothing but for recreation, are thought the ornament of a prince’s court!

. . . . .

“But as for the knight-errant, . . . let him in desolate wilds baffle the rigour of the weather, the scorching heat of the sun’s fiercest beams, and the inclemency of winds and snow: let lions never fright him, dragons daunt him, nor evil spirits deter him. To go in quest of these, to meet,

to dare, to conflict, and to overcome them all, is his principal and proper office."

A man of imagination and generous in his motives whom you love for his follies, but would not imitate for the world, the world is richer for his eccentricities.

He is watching a puppet-play busy with the romantic story of Christian and Moor. The heroine has just been rescued by the hero, and away they go with the whole Moorish garrison in full pursuit. Things look bad for the cause of knighthood and gallantry. A champion is needed and at once. The Don's imagination at once takes fire. He draws his sword. A perfectly good puppet-play is ruined of course, and the knight wakes to disillusionment. But his case is not far different from our own when we have thrown ourselves pell-mell into something we knew not what but fancied to mean the whole world. Illusions most of us are always chasing, only they are seldom as generous as the one that brought this magnificent gesture of defiance. Nor is our shame when we are disillusioned quite as courteous as his quick apology.

He is ever the perfect gentleman, as he was in *Part I*; but here his innate courtesy is given ampler room. At the Duke's house and table his bearing is far nobler than his host's. Though he meets with insolence from the down-right cleric who can look no deeper than the surface, his reply has all the stern courtesy that the occasion demands.

"If persons of honour, knights, lords, gentlemen, or men of any birth, should take me for a fool or a coxcomb, I should think it an irreparable affront. But for mere scholars, that never trod the paths of chivalry, to think me mad, I despise and laugh at it. I am a knight, and a knight will I die, if so it please Omnipotence. Some choose the high road of haughty ambition; others the low ways of base servile flattery; a third sort take the crooked path of deceitful hypocrisy; and a few, very few, that of true re-

ligion. I, for my own part, guided by my stars, follow the narrow track of knight-errantry; and, for the exercise of it, I despise riches, but not honour. I have redressed grievances, and righted the injured, chastised the insolent, vanquished giants, and trod elves and hobgoblins under my feet!"

Everything is right in the Don's plea for himself except the major premise. But how many of our poets and great men have missed the major premise likewise. Was there not something of the spirit of the crusader in Emerson, was not Shelley all his life a Don Quixote whose horse and lance, though not of the same material as the Don's were quite as ineffective and at times as ludicrous? Some of the most inspiring poetry of the world comes from this breed.

As in a fairy tale or chivalric romance, Sancho got his island, but not in the orthodox manner; again as in the fairy tale or chivalric romance, he discovered the powers of a just and true ruler, and again not in the orthodox manner. It is true that he was in the land of make-believe, that the whole business was a hoax of the Duke's contriving, but he went like Don Quixote fully prepared for its serious responsibility. The thing turned out for him quite all wrong, as things were always turning out for his master. Where he had hoped for a gourmand's paradise he discovered doctors who prescribed diet, continence, and the apples of Sodom; where he had expected quiet and ease he got uprisings and tumult, and he had none to whom he could turn for friendship. Unlike his master he knew when he had had enough, and after a short inglorious reign he resigned.

"At last, he made an end of dressing himself, and creeping along softly (for he was too much bruised to go along very fast), he got to the stable, followed by all the company; and coming to Dapple, he embraced the quiet animal, gave him a loving kiss on the forehead, and, with tears

in his eyes, 'Come hither,' said he, 'my friend, thou faithful companion, and fellow-sharer in my travels and miseries; when thee and I consorted together, and all my cares were but to mend thy furniture, and feed thy little carcass, then happy were my days, my months, and years. But since I forsook thee, and clambered up the towers of ambition and pride, a thousand woes, a thousand torments, and four thousand tribulations have haunted and worried my soul.' "

Yet Sancho was from the beginning more successful as governor than his master had been as knight-errant. For he had proved just, he had befriended the weak and oppressed, he had unmasked fraud, he had interpreted the laws wisely though he could not read them, and above all he had been guiltless of the vice of pride or greed. Though he had lasted little over a week his name was remembered as that of the good governor. The squire beat the master in the task of reforming the world.

One could go on indefinitely thus showing from adventure to adventure the gradual development in sweetness and depth of these characters. Like the great figures in Shakespeare's plays they grow under the hand of the creator, and come to have a significance quite apart from the story or the plot. Thus it is with all great personalities, they outgrow the bounds their creator had first set for them, and have a place apart in the larger world of human character. We can think of Sancho and his lean visaged master now in situations that have no connection with windmills or lions or puppet-plays; they will fit into the daily walk of anyone where ideals and reality meet to clash.

It is this clash, and the victory of reality that is the Don's final undoing. Ever solicitous of his welfare, his neighbors and friends make one last effort to bring him home to his senses and duty. The young bachelor, a student, had tried the ruse once before but had failed. Now he tries

again with better results. Dressing himself also in the appurtenances of knight-errantry as the Knight of the White Moon, he comes up with the dreamer in Barcelona. The terms of the encounter are set forth by the challenger and agreed to. The victor may prescribe to his victim what penalty he pleases, such were the laws of knight-errantry. And Don Quixote is overthrown—conquered by a stronger knight. And the terms of his defeat are that he must at the victor's will renounce knight-errantry and return home to the commonplace.

Never were farce and tragedy so near wedded as in this story of the knight's last adventure. It is the tragedy of disillusionment. It is not the fact that he has been defeated, he has been felled by his opponent before this many times; it is not even that he must for a time abstain from the life of the road. For he had at first been able to content himself with the thought of a pastoral paradise with Dulcinea and sheep and shepherds' pipes and poetry. But this had been but for a passing moment, for Don Quixote's fancy couldn't toy with a thing of such dilution. Knight-errantry is a man's business and he is a man; pastoral poetry may be all acceptable to the degenerate descendants of fighting men, but he will have none of it. And lacking a motive for living, awakening disillusioned in a world of the commonplace, old and unfitted to begin anew, he dies.

Tragedy and disillusionment? No, it is more than that. All of us are daily disillusioned and shorn of our fancied riches and powers. It is the utter emptiness that comes often, late in life, to a man who gives all to a cause or a Dulcinea or an idea, that fills his whole universe and makes life for him a thing of infinite value. Dante would have come to this had his Beatrice turned out to be only an Audrey. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* teach us something of a

similar disillusionment. But here is the tragedy of a really noble mind wholly given to a cause worthy of the Messiah. In his imagination he seems to see his dreams about to come true, and awakes to discover himself, his miserable limitations, his ridiculous equipment, and his madness. Had this malady been incurable he might have died happy. But we have seen that he was intelligent above the ordinary, and when cured he sees himself for the pitiful thing that most humanity is. All his nobility of character, all his ideals, all his glorious madness, only serve to make his case worse. It is a tragedy in its way more poignant than that of Oedipus, and it kills him.

There is nothing more simple and more moving than his last words. He is making his will, an utterly commonplace business, he is in the world of the commonplace now, and is living in the most approved manner. There are now no more gestures of this or that knightly character, but only the simple details of a simple business. There is not a hint even of self-pity in his voice, or an image of poetry. He has become downright prose, and is the more effective for his patient surrender.

Literature is full of the deaths of the great and glorious, but not often is there anything as fine or poignant as this. He died as he lived, the pattern of the perfect gentleman, without fear and without reproach. Only his bravery is much purer now than when he withstood lions or windmills. Then he had physical monsters against which man may draw a weapon. Now he has himself and his past life and his shame; and his resolution is the greater as he refuses to mitigate one jot in the judgment he passes on himself or to overlook one detail. He here makes his last confession, a confession of failure. It is this that finally makes him enter that rare company of the great.

Is Cervantes making fun of all ideals under the mask of this attack on romance? Are all ideals illusions? One can very nearly make of this the novel of the futility of most endeavor, for in it nothing prospers save folly. But here folly is of the nature of virtue. No, I believe to understand Cervantes aright one must adopt a slightly different point of view. And in this novel, and in the plays of Shakespeare likewise, and the chance wise musings of Montaigne on all manner of subjects, we shall see the large difference between the new spirit and that of the Middle Ages. It is a novel of illusions; but illusions, if used rightly, have their use. It is a protest against the idealist and reformer; but ideals have their use if they be warily selected. It is a vindication of fact against fancy, but were fact to be allowed, like Sancho, to pursue its own course in the world it would remain, as always, coarse and unvitalized. Don Quixote is ennobled by his folly. Sancho is touched into something more glorious than brute fact by contact with the ideal that he can never dream of understanding.

Cervantes' attack, if we may call the new attitude by so formidable a term, was directed not only against the romance of chivalry and its ideas, but against the whole spirit of the Middle Ages; and it is best therefore for a moment again to compare him with Dante. To the Florentine poet, as to most of his age, this world is of significance only as a part of a much larger synthesis and its facts of value only as they are judged by standards infinite and immutable. Good and bad therefore are anything but relative things, the line of distinction between them is always drawn exceeding fine. To his downright age right reason and the will of God are synonymous. There we have the spectacle of a Saint Francis or a knight-errant going about a business that in the eyes of a practical world devoted only



to temporal things savored of utter folly, but that gained for him the accolade of sainthood. What the world calls folly was in the eyes of Eternity the most vital of wisdom. But the new age of the Renaissance is interested chiefly in this world; the other, if there be one, is now to be read in terms of this life. Hence the paucity of saints that adorn the calendar after the new spirit came to prevail. Luther, Calvin, St. Xavier even, seem quite different persons from St. Francis or St. Bernard. Folly and wisdom in consequence began to be studied by new standards, selected not by looking to the stars, but by keeping one's eyes on one's feet. Life now is good or bad as it accommodates itself to the problem of living best in the here and now; if this be done wisely the future can be contemplated with confidence.

So it is that Don Quixote in his journey through life is also accompanied by a Virgil, like Dante, but his name is Sancho Panza; and his Beatrice is a creature of his imagination, without earthly counterpart, which leads him into the wildest of follies. To Dante Virgil and Beatrice are a perfect complement, one to the other: to Don Quixote they are at utter variance. And yet alone each is unsatisfying. For Sancho alone the world is meaningless, and but a simple routine from labor to sleep: and the Lady Dulcinea alone is a painted dream, and her adoration a rueful series of misadventures. All this at first sight looks like the lowest of cynicism: but it is rescued from that swamp by the recovery of character. As to Hamlet, so to Don Quixote the world may become "a sterile promontory and a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" and man a thing that brings no delight. But out of the tragedy of both is rescued that most compelling of all things admirable, human character. Like Hamlet again, the characters in

this novel rise majestically beyond their deeds and the petty world of follies in which they are engaged. And the thing that raises them is the ideal for which they find, and can ever find, no earthly counterpart. Thus their folly becomes their deepest wisdom, and its pursuit its own greatest recompense.

It is the novel of illusions, but illusions if chosen wisely bring their own great reward. The Don rides out, a reformer, to set the world aright; he is accompanied by earthly wisdom to comment on the folly of his ways. He gets himself and his companion into mess after mess of absurdities, until, at the end disillusioned and reading the comment of his own futility, he dies. He has set nothing aright but his own soul, but is not this a victory that in the end is the highest? Like Hamlet's again, the end is silence, but also peace.



## XI. QUE SÇAIS-JE?—MONTAIGNE

*"Quantum est in rebus inane."*

(Motto on ceiling of Montaigne's study).

"Man is a subject wondrous vain, diverse, and fleeting. It is difficult to discover and establish a constant and uniform judgment concerning him."

MONTAIGNE.

THE latter years of the sixteenth century were dark days for France. Of all countries save Germany it suffered most severely the immediate effects of the Reformation. And this, joined to the fact that after Louis XII and Francis I France had a succession of ineffective kings, made this period of trial the more bitter. The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew in 1572 was but one of the more uncomfortable episodes in the long period of nearly fifty years of disorder and civil war. On the one side were the Huguenots with many powerful nobles, ably led, but no less insistent and unequivocal than their opponents. On the other was the party of the League led by the powerful and sinister Guises. The quarrel was not settled until Henry of Navarre was crowned in Paris in 1593 as King Henry IV, allowing himself to accept the Catholic Communion, and by the Edict of Nantes allowing his Protestant supporters the free exercise of their faith. It was precisely during these perilous times, when friends and foes hardly knew whom to turn from or trust, that Michel de Montaigne lived and did a work that gave to France one of the im-

mortals. And the fact that for one and all life was like a dance on the crust of a volcano, that one must step lightly and keep one's feet, lends a richer significance to his understanding of man's place in the world.

There is something significant in the fact, that, boy and man, he lived most of his life on his estate not far from the city of Bordeaux. In a country of cheerful vineyards, whose main business is the industry which makes the heart of man glad, with a gentle countryside of sloping hills and rich rivers, where kindliness of spirit seems chiefly to prevail, it is not hard to create for oneself a philosophy of contentment. A reasonable optimism, or tolerant Epicureanism, that shall go far even in a day of struggle like the closing quarter of the sixteenth century. There on a gentle hill overlooking the valley of the Garonne, perhaps thirty miles from the inland seaport of Bordeaux, in a tower which yet shows signs of his work, surrounded by vineyards of his own cultivation, where there was a magic peace in the very air, Michel de Montaigne cultivated his cabbages and wrote his essays; greeting friends when they came, letting rival armies pass on the highway below, but never permitting them to disturb his tolerant peace of mind. He at least would not throw himself into a struggle whose significance even the warriors could not understand.

"Whoever shall ask a man, 'What interest have you in this siege?' 'The interest of example,' he will say, 'and of the common obedience to my prince: I pretend to no profit by it; and for glory, I know how small a part can reflect upon such a private man as I: I have here neither passion nor quarrel.' And yet you shall see him the next day quite another man, chafing and red with fury, ranged in battle for the assault."

Montaigne preferred rather to meditate.

And yet his whole life was not untouched by public em-

ployment for which his early training had fitted him. He was the special care of his father, and between them there grew a strong friendship that was to last until death. Early he was taught Latin, and lest his ears and tongue might be sullied by an inferior utterance, none were allowed to converse with him except in the approved language. At six he was sent away to the *collège* at Bordeaux to prepare for the law; and when barely twenty he was an accepted member of the parliament of that city.

All this is commonplace enough and does not yet show us one secret of the man. But in Bordeaux, associated with him in the magistracy, was young Etienne de la Boétie, a genius, one of those early flowers doomed it would seem to an early death. When only eighteen he had written what for the time was a most extraordinary and revolutionary document. Nothing like it was to appear until Milton broke out in passionate pamphlets or Rousseau wrote his amazing *Contrat Social*. He died when he was only thirty-three, but not until one of the warmest friendships in history had been cemented between him and the yet youthful Montaigne. Judging by his later writing there was little in this book by la Boétie that Montaigne would have commended except its utter fearlessness, for it is an attack—*Contr' un or Servitude Volontaire* is its title—against all tyrants; and Montaigne was first and last never a partizan in any political battle. But there was a fresh fearlessness about the thought, and an enthusiasm in the manner, and a very real originality, that attracted his more sober but resolutely independent spirit. It must have been a friendship in which each brought something of real value to the other, la Boétie poetry and enthusiasm, Montaigne sober reason; both had the spirit of utter independence. This friendship left its trace all his life long on the spirit and

manner of the essayist. He never forgot either him or his own father.

Then came the deaths of his friend and of his father. He had known public life and the court of princes, he had been to Paris and had traveled abroad, but none of these things gave the peace of mind he craved; and he came home in 1571. He celebrates his home-coming by a motto on the walls of the tower room that became his study, and lookout.

"In the year of our Lord (1571) at the age of thirty-eight years on the evening of the calends of March, the anniversary of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, long wearied by the slavery of the Court of Parliament and of the public charges, feeling himself again so disposed, resigns that he may find repose in the company of the learned Muses, in peace and security; there shall he find freedom for the days he may yet live; hoping that the fates will permit him to establish this his home. These sweet paternal retreats, he dedicates them to his liberty, to his tranquillity, and to his leisure."

It is interesting that at about the same age Dante began his *Divine Comedy* and Montaigne his voyage into the universe of his *Essays*. This *cabinet* became his world. Here in this upper room of his tower, inscribed by him with mottoes in Latin and Greek, he lived and met his friends; and from its windows he could look out on his garden of cabbages or the world that swept by on useless business. Below was his sleeping room with a comfortable fireplace; and still below on the first floor a dark little chapel, not so often visited, I judge, as the airy room above. The family and commonplace guests he kept, so we are assured, in the more commodious rooms that adjoined, for his chateau was a very real though moderate castle.

It is worth staying for a moment longer in his study, bare though it is now save for his chair and table, for the mottoes in the beams of the ceiling catch the eyes and hold them. Patiently they were put there, passages from his reading that held his fancy, or phrases that came of themselves into his own mind. They have a strong family resemblance, and remind us by their presence of the verses one reads carved in churches; but what an ironic contrast these—

*"Quantum est in rebus inane."*

*"Solum certum nihil esse certe et homine nihil miserius aut superbius."*

*"Nostra vagatur in tenebris nec caeca potest mens cernere verum."*

*"What a foolish affair is this world."*

*"Of a surety nothing is sure, and nothing more miserable or more proud than man."*

*"Our mind blinded wanders in shadows of darkness nor is it able to discover the truth."*

Is there something priggish in this man who shuts himself off from the world's business and carves such phrases to keep his courage down? Is there something ironically Rotarian about this gentleman who must discover for himself slogans? Is he consciously wanting to shock all good practical people by his idiosyncrasies and pose? His tomb is now in the building for the Faculty of Letters and Science of the University of Bordeaux. Above on the cenotaph is his effigy in armor, with helmet, sword, and steel gauntlets. Certainly of the two memorials one likes best his room with books, chair, and table. As a soldier he did his best fighting there. Was he a soldier? Did he devote his life to some sincere cause? Or was his retirement to his sweet

paternal estates a confession of defeat, and were his mottoes only a part of an exceedingly clever pose?

"Glory is too dearly bought by a man of my humor, if it is at the cost of three sound attacks of colic."

What a saying for a great man!

The melancholy French writer Sénancour somewhere has written that one never finds in Montaigne the thing one is looking for, but only the lineaments of the reader who makes the search. Now this is excellent, if true. For this would make of him a universal mirror in which all mankind may read its visage. Is Montaigne the most universal of portrait painters, who striving to portray himself in his essays has succeeded in catching the expression of one and all? Are his *Essays* the ideas, the philosophy of life, that at one time or another come to all? It is only genius of the very highest order that can be so common and so necessary, almost like light and air.

Yet there was never an author who so frankly gives you himself. Read his Preface; it is frankness itself.

"Reader, thou hast here an honest book; it doth at the outset forewarn thee that, in contriving the same, I have proposed to myself no other than a domestic and private end: I have had no consideration at all either to thy service or to my glory. My powers are not capable of any such design. I have dedicated it to the particular commodity of my kinsfolk and friends, so that, having lost me (which they must do shortly), they may therein recover some traits of my conditions and humours, and by that means preserve more whole, and more lifelike, the knowledge they had of me. Had my intention been to seek the world's favour, I should surly have adorned myself with borrowed beauties: I desire therein to be viewed as I appear in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary manner, without study and artifice: for it is myself I paint. My defects are therein to be read to the life, and my imperfections and my natural form, so far as public reverence hath permitted me. If I had lived among those nations, which (they say) yet dwell under the sweet liberty of nature's



primitive laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have painted myself quite fully and quite naked. Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book: there's no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore, farewell."

And the more you read of his essays the more you are impressed with their honesty. He paints his defects with as much nonchalance as his virtues; not as Rousseau in the *Confessions* that he may arouse sympathy or make a case against a wicked and conspiring world. He has really succeeded in painting himself quite naked, for he goes into intimacies with a naïve freedom that shocks us of the North. I am reminded of a phrase in Gibbon's *Memoirs*:

"The pains and pleasures of the body, how important soever to ourselves, are an indelicate topic of conversation. I shall not imitate the naked frankness of Montaigne, who exposes the most disgusting symptoms of his malady, and marks the operation of each remedy on the nerves and bowels."

But somehow one likes this frank Frenchman better than the more staid Englishman. He reveals more of human personality, yet his revelation is not depressing.

For he is finding the subjects of his themes in himself and using himself as a text for his discoveries. Read him in this his *Essay on Education*:

"For these are my own particular opinions and fancies, and I deliver them as only what I myself believe, and not for what is to be believed by others. I have no other end in this writing, but only to discover myself, who, also, shall, peradventure, be another thing tomorrow, if I chance to meet any new instruction to change me. I have no authority to be believed, neither do I desire it, being too conscious of my own inerudition to be able to instruct others."

Such things can be multiplied to infinity. Or he will turn and discuss his less attractive traits. Take this against his

I fear he looked at them with much the respect that many of our classical graduates have for their once linguistic tribulations. Homer was doubtless within easy reach. But the dramatists were on the higher shelves and caught the dust and kept it. Plato curiously must have impressed him as too much of a dreamer; and he too, much as Montaigne would have enjoyed a round with Socrates, lay partly neglected. But the historians and orators, no. And above all Plutarch whom he read, as he says, in a French translation. He, I fear, rarely left the table. Likewise Seneca, Cicero and a few other Latins he kept within easy reach. He found them solid meat, and full of sound sense, and no idle speculation or poetry. He liked also *Ecclesiastes*, though many now find it as dull as a dictionary. Curiously too he enjoyed Saint Paul, that amazingly successful promoter of the new religion. Montaigne had a library that would delight the scholar's mind; and he used it, not for aesthetic pleasure, but for the sound wisdom his active mind could discover in its pages. His library is his chief outlook upon the world, a window he always kept open, and it gave on the large panorama of human action and motives that make history. It was his first and best clue to the study of man and society.

"'Tis there that I am in my kingdom, and there I endeavour to make myself an absolute monarch, and to sequester this one corner from all society, conjugal, filial, and civil; elsewhere I have but verbal authority only, and of a confused essence. That man, in my opinion, is very miserable, who has not at home where to be by himself, where to entertain himself alone, or to conceal himself from others. Ambition sufficiently plagues her proselytes, by keeping them always in show, like the statue of a public square."

In spite of his love for repose and for his home, his active mind led him to travel—not travel as the orthodox do to—

day for diversion or to escape the routine of home and business, nor travel as many do carrying their country and their habits along with the *Guide Bleu* and the labels on suitcases. He traveled with an open mind that he might widen his horizon, and come to know man more intimately.

"We must not rivet ourselves as fast to our humours and complexions: our chiefest sufficiency is to know how to apply ourselves to divers employments. 'Tis to be, but not to live, to keep a man's self tied and bound by necessity to one only course; those are the bravest souls that have in them the most variety and pliancy."

For to travel is "to open one's mind to new impressions. If one does not always know what one is searching, at least one knows what one is escaping, and this at least is a veritable profit, if it allows one to escape for a moment from the tyranny of habit." So he went not as a Frenchman visiting strange countries, but as one who desired to learn intimately the country he visits, and to live as he could the new manners.

"I have a constitution of body as free, and a palate as indifferent, as any man living: the diversity of manners of several nations only effects me in the pleasure of variety: every usage has its reason. Let the plate and dishes be pewter, wood, or earth; my meat be boiled or roasted; let them give me butter or oil, of nuts or olives, hot or cold, 'tis all one to me; and so indifferent, that growing old, I accuse this generous faculty, and would wish that delicacy and choice should correct the indiscretion of my appetite, and sometimes help my stomach."

In spite of the apparent austerity that shut him up in the upper room of his tower, the key to which he always carried, Montaigne was a lover also of conversation—only he selected the parties, and tells you advisedly not to expect too much. For friendship he had the warmest of approval, for general conversation only when his restless curiosity could discover compensations.

A great deal has been written about friendship. Plato has a word or two, unforgettable in their eloquence—see his *Lysis* but above all his *Banquet*. Cicero devoted one of his most readable essays to it, one that unfortunately we make students cut their syntactical teeth on, a process that loses the very real warmth of the politician-philosopher's feelings. Bacon is coldly analytical but quite encyclopedic about it and statistically gives us all its various values and dangers. He talks about friendship on an adding machine. Emerson grows transcendently romantic over it, talks of it almost as Dante spoke of Beatrice; but his eloquence has at times a mystical flavor that leaves us mortals of less hardy wings gasping in vain as we look upward. But Montaigne is as we would all want to be if we could give our best thought utterance. He had had one perfect friend, as we all might wish to have; and he describes the experience in the easiest and yet the most difficult of words, full of the richest meaning. They are not coldly analytical, and yet when he speaks them his voice never rises into transcendental eloquence. They are full of feeling, repressed by experience and common sense; like the language of one dictating to a secretary, and not willing to reveal too much. He is talking of la Boétie—

"If a man should importune me to give a reason why I loved him, I find it could no otherwise be expressed, than by making answer: because it was he, because it was I. There is, beyond all that I am able to say, I know not what inexplicable and fated power that brought on this union. We sought one another long before we met, and by the characters we heard of one another, which wrought upon our affections more than, in reason, mere reports should do; I think 'twas by some secret appointment of heaven."

This is utilitarian; as what good friendship is not utilitarian? But it transcends the merely practical and enters into the

very heart of life itself, and makes life the more worth living.

"For in good earnest, if I compare all the rest of my life, though, thanks be to God, I have passed my time pleasantly enough, and at my ease, and the loss of such a friend excepted, free from any grievous affliction, and in great tranquillity of mind, having been contented with my natural and original commodities, without being solicitous after others; if I should compare it all, I say, with the four years I had the happiness to enjoy the sweet society of this excellent man, 'tis nothing but smoke, an obscure and tedious night. From the day that I lost him . . . I have only led a languishing life; and the very pleasures that present themselves to me, instead of administering anything of consolation, double my affliction for his loss."

It would almost seem that what Dante and the Middle Ages gave to Beatrice and the "blessed damosel" this more prosaic later age gave to a friend.

For it was a time when perfect communion between the sexes, intellectual and moral as well as erotic, was only too rare. Woman had not yet been allowed the opportunity to display her larger powers, and their very presence was doubted. Montaigne, eloquently as he spoke on education, never taught his daughters how to read. Even Milton more than a half-century later never taught his daughters more than their letters. It is no wonder then that Shakespeare, much as he made of the romance of early love, never thinks of it as a thing before which friendship must give way. See what even the newly wed Bassanio would give for his friend Antonio:

"Antonio, I am married to a wife  
Which is as dear to me as life itself;  
But life itself, my wife, and all the world,  
Are not with me esteem'd above thy life:  
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all,  
Here to this devil, to deliver you."

We must then not blame the French philosophic essayist too much, for he wrote of life as he found it, and as his age found it, though it is true that in one of his essays he does introduce a paragraph which may serve as an apology to an outraged feminist:

"The conversation also of beautiful and well-bred women is for me a sweet commerce: 'nam nos quoque oculos eruditos habemus.' If the soul has not therein so much to enjoy, as in the first, the bodily senses, which participate more of this, bring it to a proportion near to, though, in my opinion, not equal to the other. But 'tis a commerce wherein a man must stand a little upon his guard, especially those of a warm temperament, such as mine."

But this is to digress.—Friendship such as Montaigne described is rare; scarce may one be achieved in a life time, and if achieved is a prize beyond wealth or distinction. In it alone is found that perfect conversation that his eager mind craved. But he prized also the lesser conversation that with most passes for friendship, willing always to go where he might find a mind alert or a way of thought different, that his restless curiosity might be given food. In his essay on *Education* he expressly advises his pupil to search everywhere for wisdom, for who can tell where it may be found. "Let him examine every man's talent: a peasant, a bricklayer, a traveler." He commends a soul that can,

"Chat with a carpenter or a gardener with pleasure. I envy those who can render themselves familiar with the meanest of their followers, and talk with them in their own way."

And Montaigne himself had the power of drawing out people.

"My gentle and easy manners, enemies of all sourness and harshness, may easily enough have secured me from envy and animosities. . . .

I am very capable of contracting and maintaining rare and exquisite friendships."

For if properly approached his friends gave as much as they took away, and both were to that extent the gainers. "Human understanding is marvelously enlightened by daily conversation with men, for we are otherwise compressed and heaped up in ourselves, and have our sight limited to the length of our noses."

But—he reserved this only for those whom he chose, whom his mind found worth the time and the expense of spirit. To escape others he had the tower to which he could retire and lock the door.

He was in search of a philosophy of life, a way of living securely in an age that was full of peril, of repose in a day of intense and as he thought futile activity, of tolerance in an age of bitter antagonisms and civil bloodshed, of clear thinking in an age of blind partizanship, of freedom in an age of bondage, a freedom from prejudice and error, from superstition and blind fears, a freedom also from hatred and jealousy. In this he was like the fabled navigator in search of the Happy Isles of the West. He was a Columbus out to explore a new world, turning his back on the hopes and fears that the blind and unthinking live by, searching for the clue to tranquillity of mind. No. Montaigne's retirement was not a gesture of defeat or a confession of weakness. He was as brave as the captains of the new age who went forth in their crazy little vessels to conquer empires, only his empire was spiritual, and he made his voyage alone.

He was a philosopher, a lover of wisdom; and philosophy to him was no arid science of pure speculation, but a joyous mental activity. It was, as it had been with Socrates, an

essentially practical affair concerning itself with man's conduct and the state of his mind. How to meet life and yet preserve one's even temper. Life is a heaving sea with mountainous waves, and man sets forth in a narrow bark to traverse its waters; happy he who can so trim his sails, so preserve his balance, that he shall not at the first squall be engulfed. An even temper, an even keel, a chart and compass, a refusal to take risks that are uncalled for, and a readiness to recognize the port; this was for him the mission of philosophy; and if ever a man achieved this mission it was Montaigne. He was bold, bolder perhaps than any of his contemporaries, though he was never brought to the stake for heresy or gained the crown of martyrdom.

It was for this reason that he gave himself to the study of Plutarch. From him he got the moral precepts on the problems of living, and above all the marvelous *Lives* in which as in a laboratory one may, if one has insight, see the active workings of motives and conduct. "To some it is merely a grammar study, to others the very anatomy of philosophy." Studied thus it is a most practical science for it "teaches him to know himself and how both well to die and well to live." There will be something later to be said about Montaigne's constant reference to death, as though it were a very real obsession or fear. It is a perilous thought even with the best, the certainty that all this little world, built up with the utmost care, and which is all man has, must be abandoned as though it were only a futile child's game. The thought brings one up with a start in the night and banishes sleep. I think not so with Montaigne. Death as a natural phenomenon must come to all. Let it come to the philosopher with his world so ordered that he can leave it without the tragic sense of futile endeavor and



uncompleted plans. Let it be like a building that can always be added to and yet whose lines are never chaotic. Let it come when he is fully occupied and clear in his purposes; only then will a life be well lived and death a vindication. "I would that man should work ceaselessly, and that death find me planting my cabbages, and without a thought for it, and even less for my imperfect garden." If philosophy can do this, great is philosophy. Such a study should be the first as well as the last. "Among the liberal sciences let us begin with that which makes us free;" and to be free of the perplexity of life and the terror of death, is not this the aim of good living?

Free—Montaigne's definition of the good life. But not freedom as lesser breeds speak of freedom. Not freedom from one bondage that one may be bound to one's appetites. This practical Frenchman differed by a hemisphere from Rousseau and the disciples of the French or Russian revolutions; for them he would have only the supremest of contempt.

"Being assaulted, as I am by ambition, avarice, temerity, superstition, and having within so many other enemies of life, shall I go cudgel my brains about the world's revolutions?"

Free oneself of these and the world's revolutions become irrelevant, and if all are similarly freed, unnecessary. Free from prejudice, free from ignorance so far as man can be delivered of this yoke, free to know one's powers and limitations; when this freedom is achieved one may live richly and well, even though one's neighbors are insistent on reformation according to their prescript and revolution, for one will be no more perturbed by their partizan shoutings, than if they lived on the other face of the moon. Philosophy then is a joyous science, the most joyous of all

the sciences, and not the arid thing of abstraction and theory, or the asceticism of some Stoics.

"And people are much to blame to represent it to children for a thing of so difficult access, and with such a frowning, grim, and formidable aspect. Who is it that has disguised it thus, with this false, pale, and ghostly countenance? There is nothing more airy, more gay, more frolic, and I had like to have said, more wanton. She preaches nothing but feasting and jollity; a melancholic anxious look shows that she does not inhabit there. . . . The most manifest sign of wisdom is a continual cheerfulness; her state is like that of things in the regions above the moon, always clear and serene."

And the followers of philosophy can learn to live joyously whatever their condition. "She can be rich, be potent, and wise, and knows how to lie upon soft perfumed beds. She loves life, beauty, glory, and health. [She can also] lose them without concern."

Thus his *Essays* become the "dictionary of his conversations" in search of this particular brand of wisdom, or, to adopt a figure, the excursions he makes into the unknown, trails blazed into a limitless forest. And his motto, *Que sais-je?* what do I know? is his compass. Really they are an eloquent page of the richest thought of his century, on the richest of all subjects, man and his ways. The manner of them and their style were peculiarly fitted for his desultory and uneven genius. With Shakespeare the study of man takes the form of tragedy or comedy; with Cervantes whimsically idealistic farce; with Montaigne it is journalism, at its highest, chance gleanings of a mind richly endowed, thrown together without apparent plan; but by their vital and penetrating power challenging comparison with his great contemporaries. Like the true journalist he is writing only for himself, and those who are like him. The *Essays* thus become in the best sense his memoirs,

flooded with light from his inner illumination. History and the observation of life from his window give him his theme; philosophy supplies the motives. Declining the imagination of the poet, or distrusting it, he will see life neither as comic nor tragic, nor as a whimsical farce, nor as a cynical misadventure. The study will teach him only moderation and sound sense—which are the journalist's virtues—and truth. At times he will even seem cruel in his refusal to parley with the popular or the orthodox taste.

To study man and especially a great man requires greatness in the observer—Montaigne himself has said it:

"To judge of great and high matters requires a suitable soul; otherwise we attribute the vice to them which is really our own. A straight oar seems crooked in the water: it does not only import that we see the thing, but how and after what manner we see it."

But he had also the requisite greatness. By nature and training richly endowed, living in a century when humanity was nakedly displaying its character as seldom before and never since, with senses sharpened by the curiosity of the New Age, Montaigne was the man to be its reporter and philosopher.

He studies man—well, let us have it at once, the very worst that can be said of man. The much quoted passage, "Man is a subject wondrously vain, diverse and fleeting. It is difficult to discover and establish a constant and uniform judgment concerning him," does not help much. My best friend might well say that of me, or I of him, and yet neither of us lose respect for the other. No, there is something fundamentally wrong at the very heart of this human creature, an incurable illness that breaks out in all manner of symptoms. It is the discrepancy, the pitiless dis-

crepancy, between man's powers of imagination and will and his powers of achievement. He can and does imagine himself the son of the stars, the heir of all time, and the darling of his God, to whom all things are given as in fee-simple, with an appetite to embrace and understand the cosmic universe, but placed here in the dust blindly to dig a small mansion for his body into which he finally creeps, with desires all unfilled. It is this hopeless itch of human presumption that plays such havoc with all human nature. Again and again does Montaigne bring us this diagnosis.

"Presumption is our natural and original disease. The most wretched and frail of all creatures is man, and withal the proudest. He feels and sees himself lodged here in the dirt and filth of the world, nailed and rivetted to the worst and deadest part of the universe, in the lowest story of the house, and most remote from the heavenly arch, with animals of the worst condition of the three, and yet in his imagination will be placing himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing heaven under his feet.

"We have for our part inconstancy, irresolution, incertitude, sorrow, superstition, solicitude about things to come even after we shall be no more, ambition, avarice, jealousy, envy, irregular, frantic and untamable appetites, war, lying, disloyalty, detraction, and curiosity."

Against this our science, instead of being an aid, is often in reality a heavy burden.

"Have we observed that pleasure and health have had a better relish with him who understands astrology and grammar than with others? . . . And shame and poverty [are] less troublesome? . . . I have known in my time a hundred artizans, a hundred labourers, wiser and more happy than the rectors of the university, and whom I had much rather have resembled.

"The plague of man is the opinion of wisdom; and for this reason it is that ignorance is so recommended to us by our religion, as proper to faith and obedience. . . . The philosopher Pyrrho, being at sea in very great danger by reason of a mighty storm, presented nothing to those who were

with him to imitate in this extremity but the security of a hog they had on board, that was looking at the tempest quite unconcerned."

This certainly is not pleasant reading, a little depressing perhaps after all our gesturing and posturing about the "chosen of all the earth" and man made in the image of God. It begins to look as though some awkward deity made man for the grand jest of the universe—a very different picture this from Dante's vision of eternal value. Is Montaigne then a variety of ironical Dante, who for the *Divine Comedy* writes the *Diabolical Farce*? The thought is worth holding in the mind for a while.<sup>1</sup>

But he goes on in all seriousness. Man is not only imperfect and beneath the other animals in happiness and knowledge, but his boasted beauty is a thing that no one need take too seriously.

"And what qualities of our bodily constitution, in Plato and Cicero, may not indifferently serve a thousand sorts of beasts? Those that most resemble us, are the ugliest and most abject of all the herd; for, as to outward appearance and form of visage, such are the baboons and monkeys: . . . and, for the internal vital parts, the hog. In earnest, when I imagine man stark naked, even that sex that seems to have the greatest share of beauty, his defects, natural subjections, and imperfections, I find that we have more reason than any other animal to cover ourselves. . . .

"It is not modesty so much as cunning and prudence, that makes our ladies so circumspect in refusing us admittance to their closets, before they are painted and tricked up for public view."

<sup>1</sup> It is usual to take this *Apology for Raimond Sebonde* as the epitome of Montaigne's sceptical creed. But, I believe, wrongly. It gives one side, and an important one, of his musings; but is not wholly characteristic of him. He was not always so atrabiliar. One may not find a whole philosophy of life on a vacuum; and this essay leaves us nearly in that breathless region. It is a little more generous to his memory to say that here he is bent on destroying a few absurd illusions, and that in his enthusiasm he cut down also not a few flowers that in later essays he carefully strives to restore.

What a dreadful fall from the ideals of chivalry! Even Cervantes was never quite so severe, for he left something to the knight, and something more to the imagination. Where is Dante's Beatrice or Homer's Helen or Virgil's Dido to go now to hide her faded charms? Were Montaigne to be wholly true it were well for the romantic poet to declare his bankruptcy and with the rest of the world seek wisdom—where? In the cell of the anchorite?

No, Montaigne is not desirous of that answer to the problem of living. One does not learn to live wisely by ceasing to live. Such an answer—the ascetic's—is like rubbing the sponge across the slate because the answer to the problem comes in radicals and irrational figures. We must learn likewise to use these if our mathematics is to be complete. This careful thinker's answer is moderation, and self-knowledge. If man will only come to know himself thoroughly and his limitations as well as his virtues, and thus learn to accommodate himself to the attainable, he may even yet live happily. The attitude of the open mind, to keep eternally inquiring and learning, to seek for knowledge against mere opinion, even though the amount available may be little, and to act according to this knowledge, this is to be moderate; and it will in the end bring peace of mind, though it may qualify pride. "Men are tormented by the opinion they have of things, and not by the things themselves." This attitude too, will exhibit the wisdom of prudence; for the mind "will be the more nearly in equilibrium, the more it gets away from immoderate desires and violent acts; it will be better disciplined in its own ignorance and weakness and rejection of all that troubles mankind."

Now I think it is clear why Montaigne retired from the world to his study; not from the world of truth and reality,

for it was truth he was searching for, but from the world of militant opinion. Hence his motto, *Que sçais-je?* hence his emblem, the balance. The large number of contradictory philosophies and creeds had made him sceptical, the divisions and quarrels of theological sects had made him tolerant and perhaps even indifferent. He at least will not perish for an opinion, when the one he is defending, as well as the one that attacks, may like all things human be a variant of folly. It is symbolic that he kept his chapel in the least illuminated room and on the ground floor of his tower, and his study where the light and view were the finest.

What then can save man and discover for him himself and moderation and prudence? And in answering this question Montaigne is going to lay the foundation for the thought of the next two centuries, and to anticipate in more than one way the answer of modern science. He will cultivate and trust his reason. But reason for him is going to be something vastly different from the thing Dante and the Middle Ages called by that name. There is something very fine about the utter confidence these had in the power of the human mind to attain to truth absolute and final. It rarely entered their minds that, given the proper method of reasoning, any other result could be obtained; hence much of their labor was spent on perfecting the method, the deductive syllogism, which they learned from Aristotle and which is seen at its best in the processes of Euclid's Geometry. Thus the whole of geometrical truth, which is quite complex in nature, is available to any mind which accepts Euclid's axioms and postulates. It all resembles a very elaborate house, built upon a very simple foundation. You cannot doubt the axioms, nor the postulates of geometry, *ergo* you are compelled by the force of

abstract logic to accept the conclusions. That the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides may not be evident to even a bright mind as one looks at the triangle, but if a geometer takes one step by step through the logic of proof, one cannot but be compelled to give an absolute consent. And this is a truth which does not depend on time or place or on the quality of the weather. The same precision they fancied, and the same absolute character was possible in questions far more abstruse.

It is curious also how they used the same method of reasoning in matters that to-day would seem to belong to another quite different region. Dante, for example, is supposed to have delivered as a lecture at the University of Bologna the famous pamphlet, the *Question Concerning Land and Water*. It raises a favorite bit of speculative inquiry, whether the land is higher than the water or the water than the land. To us of course the whole thing is quite absurd; but good minds of the Middle Ages were concerned with what looked like a paradox, an inexplicable jest on the part of nature. By all the laws of logic land ought to be lower than water. There are four elements, earth, air, fire, water. Of these fire is the most ethereal, and hence the highest, for does not fire always ascend, and above somewhere is the region of fire. On his way to Heaven Dante went through it. Below it is the region of air—the place of this is without logic apparent to the senses. Water is the next element in the order of weight, *ergo* it must be higher than the land; and the apparent fact that land protrudes above the sea must be a sense delusion; *ergo*, etc. You can't escape it, by logic. And Dante, clear thinker that he was, has a time of it, by logic, to prove that what seems to be true is in reality also logically true. In



other words, at that time it was not enough to go out with some scientific device and prove by experiment and observation that a thing is so and so: the reason must also be persuaded by appeal to universal logic.

By reason so employed St. Thomas Aquinas was able to arrive without a possibility of doubt at the most elaborate system of theological dogma ever conceived by the human mind. By the same reason, in the higher spheres of Heaven, Dante is able to pass a successful examination on the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, before the celestial examiners, Saints Peter, James, and John. By the same reason, coupled with revelation, which was but a higher and intuitive form of the earthly reason, he was able to ascend to and gaze upon the person of Divinity itself. And to the medieval mind these revelations, these conclusions of its logic, were *per se* universally valid—to question them, after the logic was demonstrated, was to be guilty of intellectual uncleanness, and moral guilt. Even as late as the century following Montaigne scholars were unwilling to allow themselves to be duped into looking through Galileo's telescope to see the spots on the sun. For how could the sun, the *perfect* eye of the universe, suffer ophthalmia? The senses may be deceived, but the logical reason, never!

Contrasted with this use of the reason Montaigne distinctly is anti-intellectual, as has been modern science, preferring experiment and objective verification by the senses, to any of the paraphernalia of abstract logic. But whether the method be for better or worse—for something can yet be said for the logic of the Middle Ages—Montaigne definitely thinks of the reason as a guide in practical matters, and not as a means of arriving at eternal truth. His complaint against man is directed not against man in the

abstract but against man as he has read him in history, seen him in conversation, examined him closely in himself, and seen his fantastic tricks in the history of his own day. It begins with no axioms or postulates, but only with an open mind and a power of close and clear observation; and by the multitude of examples his own day and history furnish he arrives at a conclusion that seems to verify the facts. Just as Kepler by the observation of the daily positions of the planets finally drew up his laws of planetary motion, so does Montaigne with the motions of the human mind. And both likewise deserve serious consideration; that they may both be false we cannot doubt, but if the observers are well trained and their observations sufficiently accurate, we should be chary of our disapproval.

It is this practical and observing reason that Montaigne will trust to guide in this topsy-turvy world; it is the only guide we have he confesses, and though he speaks respectfully of revelation for those who can take it, he for his part puts its use in his dark, ground-floor chapel. So he will judge experience on rational grounds, and will have as little to do with its thrill as possible; and the experiences he will trust are those that he can most easily verify. He writes, "I had much rather regulate my affairs by the throw of dice, than by dreams." Remember the dreams that came to Dante in Purgatory and their perfect meaning. He chides those who would look elsewhere than to cold facts for guidance, or those who live in their imagination, longing for facts that are more congenial: "We seek other conditions, by reason we do not understand the use of our own; and go out of ourselves, because we do not know how to reside. 'Tis to much purpose to go upon stilts, we must yet walk with our legs; and when seated upon the most elevated throne in the world, we are but

seated upon our breech." For it is only in ourselves at the last that we can discover the things that will make us wise in our actions. "I had rather understand myself well in myself, than in Cicero. Of the experience I have of myself, I find enough to make me wise, if I were a good scholar." This is nothing more than to say that experience is the best teacher, and its lessons come only to those who can observe and reason.

How different this from the poetic use of experience as a means of inducing thrills. Walking on stilts, for one who has not yet learned the full use of his legs, will doubtless provide an ocean of thrills, it may be romantically ecstatic to look over the heads of one's fellows and be companion to the clouds, but it is not reasonable. Montaigne will have none of it in his code of actions fitted for a man who would live safe in an insecure world. He will be self-dependent, not trusting to fortune or to others.

"At last, I saw that it was safest for me to trust to myself in my necessity; and if it should so fall out, that I should be but upon cold terms in Fortune's favour, I should so much the more pressingly recommend me to my own, and attach myself and look to myself all the more closely. Men on all occasions throw themselves upon foreign assistance to spare their own, which is alone certain and sufficient, to him who knows how therewith to arm himself."

And he smiles at "some, who could never have been so by other means, [who] will be made famous by their misfortunes." This is unreasonable.

See how coldly he analyses motives in his essay *Of the Inconstancy of our Actions*. See how exquisitely he plays, and romantically, with the poetic idea of cannibals, the "noble savage" to become so popular with Chateaubriand, Cooper, and others, who trace their various virtues and compare them with the vices of civilized Europe. Rousseau

could not have done better—and the noble savage was a ninth wonder of the world in those early days of romantic discovery. Then see how at the end of the essay he puts his tongue in his cheek—"All this does not sound very ill and the last was not at all amiss, for they wear no breeches." He discusses quite impartially, without any other motive than to arrive at a code of manners, the idea of suicide in *A Custom of the Isle of Cea*. The evidence for both sides he takes up and examines, and then on quite rational grounds arrives at a conclusion which is in itself something of a compromise. But the point is this: there is scarcely a subject upon which less reason and more emotion has been expended. The Roman Stoic despising death and gloriously taking his own life, like Brutus or Cato—the thought is tragically thrilling. Or, on the other hand, Dante's Hell of the suicides, the drear, leafless wood, the thunders of the church, the suicide burial at a crossroad with a stake through the breast—these things too are thrilling. But Montaigne is looking for rational motives for conduct on occasions that may arise in any life. What is best for the wise man?—and he summons examples that his observation may be complete.

"Security, indolence, impassibility, the privation of the evils of this life, which we pretend to purchase at the price of dying, are of no manner of advantage to us: that man evades war to very little purpose, who can have no fruition of peace; and as little to the purpose does he avoid trouble who cannot enjoy repose."

This is sound sense, not an emotional gesture.

Or again take that famous essay, *A Demain les Affaires*—which has been mistranslated into *Tomorrow is a New Day*. It is an essay on procrastination. What a jewel Lamb would have fashioned on the subject, how praised the

habit of never doing to-day what can be put off till to-morrow. The theme is fascinating for an impressionist who is looking only for the thrill a common frailty may arouse. But Montaigne goes about it in an utterly different manner—the evils and good of putting off business until one is in a better mood for it, or until one can more conveniently discharge it. Why! this thing is wise; searching for counsel, whimsical, of course, in the manner of charming conversation, but never an ethical philosopher spoke more convincingly. It is reason speaking and illustrating its speech by a multitude of pertinent examples.

Now it was precisely because he wished his reason to be ministered to, rather than his poetic imagination, that he chose his reading as he did, history and moral essays, instead of poetry and fiction. He wished to be informed rather than to be inspired. Indeed he distrusts inspiration, for is it not as liable to encourage lunacy as revelation? "I have a singular curiosity, to pry into the souls and the natural and true opinions of the authors with whom I converse." So Plato for him has too many visions and rhapsodies, Cicero "too many trimmings," he is concerned too much with the beauties of style and language—a singular criticism in his day when every one was trying to be Ciceronian. He wants a downright style. Then, we ask, why does he write so whimsically? He fears poetry, and reads it not for any romantic picture of the past, nor for its charm or imagery, nor for the story, but for moral instruction. From his reading as from his observation of himself and others he is anxious to discover a code of rational manners.

A code of rational conduct, a code of manners, much is going to be made of this in the next great generation of French authors; for the new classical tradition, as well as

much else, is going to be traced back to its fountain in Montaigne. He is more French than the French themselves, but he has much of the universal also in his fashion and speech. He is going to introduce the age of reason, of good sense, of moderation in all things. But he also sees ahead to the age of science which in the same manner is rational and objective and dispossessed of all prejudice.

Hence we shall expect to find him rather afraid of the emotions and the emotional value of experience—the thing that some have called the romantic attitude. Perhaps this is because he was by nature rather coldly endowed. “I have no great experience of these vehement agitations, being of a soft and heavy complexion.” Certainly he was not a Rousseau or a Shelley or even an Emerson. But one may doubt the coldness or discount it, for the revelations in the *Essays* do not show any human lack, only he had learned to keep his passions well under control. So much so that he distrusted those who make it a business to exploit them. “Preachers very well know that the emotions which steal upon them in speaking animate them toward belief; and in a passion we are more stiff in the defense of our proposition, receive a deeper impression of it, and embrace it with greater vehemence and approbation, than we do in our colder and more temperate senses.” If this is true of preachers, how much more must audiences and readers of the poets be liable to exploitation.

But that he could feel keenly we have no little evidence. His preoccupation with the theme of death—Was it a fearful obsession as many critics think? *To Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die*. What cold comfort this cheerless title holds out, as a chalice of hemlock! But it is not all perilous reading. This paragraph perhaps is the most severe:

"I was born betwixt eleven and twelve o'clock in the forenoon the last day of February 1533, according to our computation, beginning the year the 1st of January, and it is now but just fifteen days since I was complete nine-and-thirty years old; I make account to live, at least, as many more. In the mean time, to trouble a man's self with the thought of a thing so far off, were folly. But what? Young and old die upon the same terms; no one departs out of life otherwise than if he had but just before entered into it; neither is any man so old and decrepit, who, having heard of Methuselah, does not think he has yet twenty years good to come. Fool that thou art, who has assured unto thee the term of life? Thou dependest upon physicians' tales: rather consult effects and experience. According to the common course of things, 'tis long since that thou hast lived by extraordinary favour; thou hast already outlived the ordinary term of life. And that it is so, reckon up thy acquaintance, how many more have died before they arrived at thy age than have attained unto it; and of those who have ennobled their lives by their renown, take but an account, and I dare lay a wager thou wilt find more who have died before than after five-and-thirty years of age."

Yet here Montaigne is writing like an actuary. But how philosophical is this next passage, so famous that Robert Louis Stevenson did not hesitate to lay hands upon its substance:

"I believe, in truth, that it is those terrible ceremonies and preparations wherewith we set it out, that more terrify us than the thing itself; a new, quite contrary way of living; the cries of mothers, wives, and children; the visits of astounded and afflicted friends; the attendance of pale and blubbering servants; a dark room, set round with burning tapers; our beds environed with physicians and divines; in sum, nothing but ghostliness and horror round about us; we seem dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they are best acquainted with, when disguised in a visor; and so 'tis with us; the visor must be removed as well from things as from persons; that being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but the very same death that a mean servant, or a poor chambermaid, died a day or two ago, without any manner of apprehension. Happy is the death that leaves us no leisure to prepare things for all this foppery."

Is the poet merely whistling to keep up his courage in the dark? There have been such. For death is the next to the most emotionally potent theme in the world; and some of the finest poetry from the Bible to Omar Khayyam has been composed in its honor or fear. Some stand aghast before its dread presence and never escape the shadow; some search for an anodyne in love and the juice of the grape. These are obsessed. But to Montaigne it is the last and most inevitable of all human phenomena, to be born is to die—this alone can be predicted of all. It is a thing that some dread, some with religious faith look forward to, some,—and their attitude is not all to be condemned,—like the animals, ignore. It is hence of the utmost importance to the philosopher that he study the meaning of this the greatest mystery of life, especially to the philosopher who has divested himself of all occult or dogmatic faiths. No. Montaigne is obsessed with the idea of death as the mathematician is obsessed with his unknowns and variables. He is searching it for its hidden significance, for in that way lies wisdom and the secret of life. But his method of search is the opposite to that of the poet who by imagery and rhythmic emotion writes a sonnet on the universal destroyer, or with passionate pleading stretches out his arms to the sable spirit that shall bring him at last to peace. Montaigne knew the power and majesty of death, he felt keenly, for to know is to feel, but he pushes aside the veil that he may inquire.

Or take Montaigne on the most emotionally potent theme of all, and the one responsible for most of our poetry and many of our actions—love. Reading some of his essays one can easily imagine that he was one of the coldest of individuals and that he took this universal experience craftily qualified with sedate and reflecting philosophy.



But his own words are clear against the cold-blooded critic. One does not need to go far for evidence. Take this naïve confession: "I have seldom given myself up to common and mercenary embraces: I would heighten the pleasures by the difficulty, by desire, and a certain kind of glory." This might very easily make romantic poetry. He loved the beauty of women. "Beauty is the true prerogative of woman." Yes, he could have written sonnets like his contemporary Ronsard. "I there scalded myself in my youth, and suffered all the torments that poets say are to befall those who precipitate themselves into love without order or judgment." But "whipping has made me wiser since." Most, however, do not thus learn wisdom like the chastised dog. "Even those to whom old age denies the practice of their desire, still tremble, neigh, and twitter for love." To be sure this last was written, perhaps maliciously, about women, but it is true of both sexes. Only he will not twitter and neigh. He will coldly examine this universal passion that makes fools or angels of men.

And examine it he did. I will not more than mention the long essay in which he tears aside all the veils and lays bare the mystery. There must be veils and mysteries if the chivalric notion of love is to keep its potency. But if one knows too much one becomes like the physician who cures love's ailments, or like the moralist who has learned to value it at its true value, or the modern realist who ruthlessly exposes and makes it seem odious. Perhaps Montaigne's action here again was the wisest and best. In this, as on the subject of death, he took the philosopher's course, not because he had not known the emotional value of the experience, rather he penetrates behind it to secure a more adequate knowledge and wisdom.

It is the usual custom to call Montaigne a sceptic, as did

Emerson, a wise sceptic, and let it go at that. There is in this doubtless a degree of truth, especially if one reads his *Apology for Raimond Sebonde* as his central essay. But there is a deal more he says about human nature and philosophy, that can hardly be described as sceptical. His is, like that of the modern scientist, the attitude of the open mind. He is searching for evidence, for a code of manners for living. He is moderation; somewhere between the idealism of a Dante, that in the hands of the unwise may easily become the folly of a Don Quixote, and the pure, down-on-all-fours materialism, good-natured and easily led and often affectionate, of a Sancho Panza. The one lives with his head often in the Platonic clouds forgetful of his standing, the other never raises his eyes above his earthly appetites. Here is the man who wisely abstains from too generous a giving of himself to ideas and ideals until he has assured himself of their reasonableness and his feet of firm standing.

He lived in an age when the defense of dogma meant the endangering of one's peace of mind and life. He will distrust dogma that comes without reason fair and open in both hands. He will especially distrust dogma whose defense is the thrill of emotional partizanship. He at least will preserve his reason and good sense, even if the whole world reel in a drunken madness.



## XII. THE IRONICAL REPLY SHAKESPEARE

"What a piece of work is a man."

*Hamlet.*

Behold, the heavens do ope,  
"The Gods look down, and this unnatural scene  
They laugh at!"

*Coriolanus.*

"O! Iago, the pity of it, Iago!"

*Othello.*

MONTAIGNE, secure within the walls of his tower, studied life as a philosopher or a scientist and cultivated the cabages of his garden. He at least would save himself "the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to;" and as one reads his words of wisdom one also feels secure in the tower of contemplation. It is good to be there and look down with pity or amiable tolerance on the victims of fortune. It is the security of the philosopher in his retreat, or of the scientist in his guarded laboratory. But as we turn to Shakespeare we are assailed by the manifold din of life itself. Here if we shall discover a pattern it must be caught on the wing; if we shall hear the meaning of the riot it must be with ears attuned to a whisper scarce heard amid the clamor.

How did Shakespeare, the son of a quiet Midland village, a runaway from home, a member of a despised profes-

sion, who like others was turning what good people regarded as scandal into great poetry, how did Shakespeare with no pretense to a background for letters such as that enjoyed by the scholarly Dante or Montaigne, how did he learn so much of life and its ways? Where did he catch the torturing remorse of Macbeth, or the anguish of Hamlet, or the magnanimous romance of Antony and Cleopatra? As well ask where Homer caught the glory of the face that launched a thousand ships and the disillusioned grief of Achilles, or the evening sunset its charm or the summer breeze its power to still human longings. There are things in heaven and earth above the reach of mortal philosophy, and their potency is the perpetual miracle of nature. What we know of Shakespeare's life is as drab as last week's newspaper. He married in haste, fought certain debtors and creditors, willed his wife his second best bed—what did he do with his best?—died in the way of nature, had hopeless doggerel carved on his tombstone as his epitaph, and left it to others, apparently quite without concern, to bring to light his poetry. You can't explain the man, even by the most confident modern psychology.

More has been written on Shakespeare than on any other single subject in the world except religion and the weather. It is only on the subject of the relation of man to his world, as Shakespeare seems to see it, that this chapter can hope to say anything that may avoid the commonplace of hopeless repetition; and yet it is as far from my purpose to suggest anything novel.

Shakespeare the ironic, the master of irony. There are ironies and ironies—irony, a weak and attractive variety much cultivated, like pepper scattered over one's food to give an unexpected poignancy to the pleasure of eating; and irony, a deep seated bitterness against life that infects

every thing it touches. The one is like the light shiver that comes with the summer breeze at sunset, cool, charming and genial; the other may become a winter's storm that freezes all human affection. Neither of these was quite the irony that makes the unique Shakespeare.

And yet he knew them both. There is a world of delicious youthful irony in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* exploding in the rollicking laugh of the mischief-intoxicated Puck. The serious young lovers set out on what looked like a summer evening's picnic, and were caught in the wiles of powers they could neither see nor understand; and the cross-currents that suddenly set all their minds awry threatened to play havoc with their lives. Of course all came out as it should in the end, and the young people had only slept in the forest and dreamed. This is the optimism of youth, confident in its own destiny and innocence; but it is sprinkled with a dash of irony to sharpen the appetite. Such irony is a mild diversion, like a brief summer shower, during a picnic, that threatens and thunders, and makes wild scurryings, but in the end paints the sunset with more beauty, and lends an added adventure to a perfect day. It abounds in saws and proverbs, and seeming oracular wisdom—"What fools these mortals be." It is the sort of thing youth affects, for it seems to lend weight and depth of experience; and romantic old age is never without it. Shakespeare dealt lovingly, in his earlier comedies, and even in his tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, in this variety of irony. But because it has no large depth of experience behind it, being not much more than youthful smartness, it alone could not make great poetry.

Nor is the irony of Jaques in *As You Like It* of a much deeper variety, or to be taken much more seriously. Jaques is, like many of us, on a summer's holiday in the Forest of

Arden—that paradise of summer resorts where lions will not eat sleeping men and villains are converted into angels by an afternoon's nap. In this place where there are books in the running brook, sermons in stones, and good in everything, irony finds fitting consort in romance. Indeed romance would falter without it. This is the time to sing, "Freeze, freeze then bitter sky," for the bite of frost and of man's ingratitude is soft and genial in the Forest of Arden. No summer resort is complete without a Jaques.

For Jaques is far from miserable. He enjoys indulging an ironic, poetic fancy, where irony and poetry are perfectly safe—in the Forest of Arden—and he is on his vacation. It is an easy, popular irony, quite his own, because it has no background, and is as attractive as it is shallow.

"I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, which, by often rumination, wraps me in a most humorous sadness."

It is a release, like the shedding of the conventional life and conventional clothes and a retirement to the mountains and early hours. As with us most go the way of romance and love making. Even Touchstone, the wisest of fools, has to discover his Audrey; but others who are wiser seek solitude and moralizing and irony:

"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts."

This is charming but not at all dangerous, and Jaques has to be clever—very clever—to retain his popular pose. He is the shadow against which the romance is the more bright.

This early and romantic use of irony, where characters by their best motives raise difficulties unforeseen to heighten the exquisite thrill of the love story, or the author by a paradoxical character distils a clever mist of melancholic gloom into what is a charmingly sun-lit landscape—Jaques loves the shade—these devices are as old as literature, only Shakespeare used them a bit better than other poets. But they show no great insight into either human character or Shakespeare's genius. There is the other extreme of irony that Shakespeare almost reached once or twice, which is a far different thing and far from attractive, though it may at times seem necessary. To it life is a bitter jest, an unnatural scene on which the gods and the poet look down and laugh. To such, an *Iliad* is a bungling adventure in which unintelligence and greed and passion and blind chance are more potent than virtue and reason; and these last too much lacking in foresight to achieve their own safety. Here the unhuman prevails against the human, and the only wisdom is that of withdrawal from the scene and contempt. For there is no nobility, there is no attractiveness, that can serve as a compensation for human failure, and you rise from the spectacle, not with the conviction that human life is worth while even if it destroys itself, but that the whole conflict is hopelessly ugly.

This attitude Shakespeare nearly achieved in at least two of his plays. I am thinking of his efforts in what to-day would be called the problem drama, at a time when the audience demanded a good story, with plenty of obvious action. Being a fairly successful theatrical manager, the poet could not ignore the demand, but effected what might

be called an unsatisfactory compromise. They are the plays *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Frankly I do not like these, nor can I see how the audience at the Globe Theatre could have liked them, except for the fact that they do give a story with a great deal of action, and that in the end things turn out well for the more deserving characters. But the characters are neither strong nor convincing, as they are in his other plays. They are effective only as most excellent studies of certain irrelevant persons. *All's Well* is a study of the nasty intrigues that went on in all little and big courts, and Angelo is doubtless cast for a Puritan Judge; *Measure for Measure* has the eternal problem of a woman's right to the man of her choice.

But what a fall here from Shakespeare's usual attitude toward life. Isabella is beautiful and virtuous, and indignant when she ought to be, but helplessly stupid. Where is the fire that could make even the unvirtuous attractive, and indignation tragic? And Mariana—my sympathies are with the young count, who so unceremoniously has a wife hung about his neck, beautiful no doubt and alarmingly intelligent, but he was not fine and felt his inferiority. And her shifts and schemes to gain her ends, like those that her duller sister Isabella is prompted to—these things do not square with what we would like to call the reasonable life. They suggest the newspapers and divorce proceedings rather than the author of *Macbeth* or *Lear*. If life be such an unintelligent scramble, well may the ironical say *tant pis*. It is a nasty business when both these heroines of virtue must serve as procuresses to vice to save their own virtue. Doubtless the audiences for which Shakespeare wrote liked the gamy flavor of these plays—for in those days the stage was both newspaper and literature. This is not to talk pleasantly about irony, like



Jaques, but to show the ironical business that life is in the raw. It is naturalism.

It is a conflict that was in the mind of the younger Shakespeare, a conflict between irony and the usual down-right optimism of romantic youth, that lends a curious uncertainty to several of his plays. We do not know whether to call them tragedy or comedy; or if they are comedy there is a bitterness and a seriousness about them quite at odds with the comic laughter of pure gaiety. The experience is as disillusioning to the spectator as to the character. Look at the predicament of frayed Claudio and Hero in *Much Ado*. In *Othello* we shall push the adventure to bitter tragedy, but shall recover something of respect and even grandeur in the bewildered and grief-stricken figure of Othello, never so just to his own character and ideals as when he acted most paradoxically. Love and the purest of motives drive him to the most heinous crime; and his remorse in the act is his spiritual vindication. This is tragedy. But Claudio, had he truly loved, how could he so light-mindedly cast away his betrothed? He has wounded a lady's name, and yet the fact gives him no more concern than the loss of a glove. And Hero, under the cloud, is as unheroic as an obscured star. Is Shakespeare making a tragedy; or is the tragically addled romance set in here to give an opportunity to the clearer figures of Beatrice and Benedict? It is Benedict the scoffer at romance, the man of many words, and Beatrice, more brilliant and quite as much its overt foe, that ironically atone for the insult offered to romance.

But it is the irony in the *Merchant of Venice* that for the first time shows Shakespeare's vision of life most clearly. The theme was undoubtedly meant for a good comedy at the expense of the crafty and revengeful Jew. He is dan-

gerous, like Molière's *Tartuffe*, and at first almost as repulsive, and like *Tartuffe* he is ironically caught in the net of his own spreading; and finally, as in *Tartuffe*, it is a *deus ex machina*, only here a *dea*, that proves his undoing. All this is good comedy as it later became in Molière. But what of Shylock as Shakespeare gradually develops the arch-villain? As ironically he gets control of his victim—by the sheerest of accident—so ironically the chance of the moment lays bare his heart, and we see the suffering, not of the justly punished villain, but of one more sinned against than sinning. It is tragedy, comedy, farce, this scene when his daughter, his most precious jewel, elopes with a mountebank of the hated Christians, carrying with her his treasures. His cry is full for us of laughter and pity.

"I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin! No news of them? Why, so: and I know not what's spent in the search: Why thou—loss upon loss! the thief gone with so much, and so much to find the thief; and no satisfaction, no revenge: nor no ill luck stirring but what lights on my shoulders; no sighs but of my breathing; no tears but of my shedding."

Yet what shall we say next to this? The mask of laughter has suddenly been lifted and we are looking at the very face of tragedy—

"I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian ex-

ample? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

Here in the *Merchant of Venice* we have the illogical, insane, picture of life itself, as it presents itself to the man of irony in its irrelevant relevancy. The comic Shylock suddenly converted into a tragic hero, claiming vindictively the rights of outraged personality before a hostile world. The smug Antonio as suddenly the victim of revengeful hate, a man who in his life had never harmed a fly, now for a service done a friend, about to forfeit his life. The romantic Bassanio rudely called from his dream of bliss to witness the sacrifice of his friend; impotent to offer the slightest aid; and salvation as suddenly discovered in the subtle and unexpected wiles of the heroine of romance. The thing is topsy-turvy like life, and the poet seeking in it a pattern discovers irony. But is it comedy or tragedy? The only answer if one seeks for one is in Montaigne—"Man is a creature wondrous vain, diverse, and fleeting. It is difficult to discover and establish a constant and uniform judgment concerning him."

In the comedies of Shakespeare tragedy lurks always just around the wings, even at times forcing its fearful presence upon the stage; and in the tragedies there is always the drawn smile of bitter comedy. Even in a play as joyous as *As You Like It*, behind the gaiety of the romance there lurks, like the famished lioness, the sombre power of unnatural kindred and politic hatred. There is uncontrollable passion that bursts out in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, that almost wrecks the pretty card house of romance. The fairies in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* can be maliciously as well as delicately sportive. An accident blown in by winds from the sea is all that saves

*Twelfth Night* from pitiful disaster. Shakespeare's world of comedy is anything but a secure world, and it is human nature alone that is comic. In Aristophanes the comic poet was the critic who sat aloof and passed judgment on this farce men make of life, but it is a human farce controlled by human motives though grotesquely distorted. In Shakespeare the power that shapes comic ends as well as tragic is not always human, it is the "*quantum inane in rebus*", the gross of the irrational in all human business. And the *inane* plays no favorites, it usually looks strangely like pure accident.

At moments when the comic interest is the highest, at some crisis, or at the apparent fulfillment of some anticipated joy, comes the burst of its sinister power, like sheer malignant envy, threatening utter destruction to all within its reach. Such is the situation in *Much Ado*. The marriage of Claudio and Hero is toward, and the happy pair with their friends plan to net also the wayward Benedict and Beatrice to make a foursome. It is done in one of the prettiest pieces of pure comic badinage in all literature, and the wild fowl are safely snared. Suddenly out of the clear sky comes the envious plotting of the sinister Don John. There is no question of his motive, still less of his power, and the little romance would have been shattered had it not been for the irrelevant watchfulness of the irresponsible Dogberry and Verges. An accidental fool spoils a perfect plot and saves the comedy, just in the nick of time. It is at the same point of high interest in the *Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock bares his fangs. The crisis of the casket scene is past and the happiness of the two worthy lovers complete, when a hurried messenger draws the bridegroom to Venice and the trial for his life of his friend. These are brutal accidents, but they come so pat that they look like

a haunting malevolence just waiting its opportunity to destroy. The effect is dramatically to heighten interest, by this tragic irony in comedy. But its effect is also to show the strange waywardness of life itself and its carelessness with all human endeavor, "*quantum inane in rebus*", even in the most cheerful comedy.

The same inanity gives an ironic power to tragedy in the mingling of the tragic and comic, or the near approach of comedy to tragedy. For centuries commentators on the tragedies have worried about the intrusion of such comic foolery as the drunken porter in *Macbeth* or the garrulous grave-diggers in *Hamlet*. By some the scenes have been called comic relief, to allow the awful suspense of the tragedy for a moment to be forgotten in the chatter of grotesque fools. Shakespeare uses comedy in all of his greatest plays, the fool and feigned fool in *Lear*, the countryman with his asps in *Antony and Cleopatra*, even the obscene but lovable nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. *Coriolanus* I believe is the only tragedy that lacks a fool or clown. The scenes always occur just when the tragic horror is the deepest, and postpone for a moment the crisis. But it is far from relief that the audience feels as it gasps at the meaningless convincingness of the encounter of tragedy and comedy. It is life showing its two masks at once. How utterly unlike the mind of Macbeth is the muddled stupor of his porter, and yet both are under the same roof: the porter ushering imaginary souls along the primrose path to damnation; Macbeth already at its portals. It is not relief, it is the turn of the screw bringing the impossible, yet vividly real, to the already impossible; and the bitter smile with which we greet the comic interlude is almost the grin of the death's head.

Where is there anything in the world more terrible in

its awful implication than Lear's greeting to the gibbering Edgar—

“What! have his daughters brought him to this pass?  
Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?”

This is comedy, grotesque, irrelevant, an indecent exposure of a gaunt mind and heart. Racine, even Sophocles, would not have dared so much. But it is the more terrible for its grotesque truth. For the irony of comedy is the severest load tragedy can carry, and it is only the genius of Shakespeare that has given it such free expression, allowing even the lowest of farce to intrude on the sacred pity and terror of exalted tragedy.

More than this, in one at least of his greatest tragedies the comic is always just below the surface, ready to show its mask on the slightest occasion. In this respect *Hamlet* is unique in literature. For though it is the story of a blood feud and revenge, it soon, like Hamlet's own mind, loses its way in the far more significant thing, the maze of Hamlet's character; and Hamlet is far too fine an intellectual character long to allow himself to be swept on the tragic sea of passion. He has complete mastery of every situation but one; he is ironically aloof when emotionally he should be most engaged; he is able even to analyse his own motives and pronounce judgment. His ability is perfect to cope with character, be it Polonius the senile whom it was easy to dupe; or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the courtiers, who had only one standard by which to measure character; or the king who was no man's fool, but never more than Hamlet's foil; or the sacrilegiously garrulous grave diggers. Only in his emotional condemnation of all women he missed one thing in the character of Ophelia and could not foresee the effect of grief on the lonely girl.

These masterings of character by character, these playings upon their peculiar frets and strings, himself to be played on by none, these things are comedy of the highest order. It is almost a game of chess with his life as a forfeit, and he is as clever as a professional in searching out and anticipating his adversary's next move. It was only brute accident again, accident that looks like cosmic purpose, that took his life and brought the game to a tragic and ironic draw.

In this ironical game of life that Shakespeare so compellingly lays before us it is only the wise men who will not stake too much and fools who have nothing to stake that escape. The others plunge into the game which is played safely only in the Forest of Arden. But it is something wholly admirable in human character that forces it, sometimes even against its will, to lay a life as a stake.

It was this conviction that seemed to grow upon Shakespeare—the utter discrepancy between character and the situations of life, the irony of living—that led him to the choice of most of the themes of his history plays. The series begins with the tragic story of poor Henry VI, a man who would have made an excellent private citizen, but by the irony of events became a wind-blown king. It closes with the study of Wolsey in *Henry VIII* whose career ought to be a warning to those who would venture far beyond their depth.

“O Cromwell, Cromwell!  
Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal  
I serv'd my king, he would not in mine age  
Have left me naked to mine enemies.”

The astute Henry IV is anything but happy, controlled by events rather than controlling them, and dies with an ironic

conviction of life's meaninglessness. And Richard II, a weakling as a king, but admirable as a private citizen, is like a child turned loose in a tempest, so utterly incomprehensible to him are his unexpected, and unmerited blows.

"How sour sweet music is,  
When time is broke and no proportion kept!  
So is it in the music of men's lives.  
And here have I the daintiness of ear  
To check time broke in a disorder'd string;  
But for the concord of my state and time  
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke."

Nor is the case different for the more aggressive Richard III, whose unscrupulousness is united with power. Like Macbeth he discovers that the very qualities that made him king are at last his undoing.

What moral does Shakespeare draw from history? As with Montaigne so with the English poet, history is the very "anatomy of philosophy," but again it is a philosophy that the orthodox moralist would have difficulty in defining. It is not much more than Montaigne's, "it is difficult to discover any uniform judgment." "*Quantum inane*"—far better it is not to venture on the heights where the going is slippery and the precipices have no favorites, and where the opportunities to play "fantastic tricks before high heaven" will bring tears, if not to angels, at least to men.

Like Montaigne, Shakespeare read the same lesson in his studies of Plutarch and ancient history. The fate of Caesar: it can be moralized over, perhaps—at least the poet establishes a judgment concerning him—but what of the idiotic repercussion that overwhelms the stainless Brutus? Did life act justly when it permitted the blow to Caesar; and smile with bitter irony as it turned the edge of the knife



against his executioner? For even his enemies can find no sentence to pronounce against him.

"This was the noblest Roman of them all."

Most ironical is the situation of Coriolanus. Not a good man wholly, but one Aristotle would commend for tragedy, possessed of one serious tragic flaw, his pride. Yet this quality is the very thing needed for his place and in the wars amply justifies itself for the glory of Rome. Then when all seems secure, with illogical enmity the Commons turn against and exile him. It is more than his downright virtue can endure, and he joins the enemies of Rome, bringing fire and destruction to the very gates of his own city. He is vindicated; but in what an ironic manner—a thing he ought to have foreseen. The destruction of his city would mean the death of his own friends and family, and even his proud mother, wrapt up in the glory of her son, pleads its cause against him. The mockery of it—his own vindication is his undoing. "The gods look down, and this unnatural scene they laugh at." This again is not the moralist speaking. But what splendid passionate poetry on the other hand as the personality of this proud man is suddenly laid bare. His fate is like that of Achilles.

"O my mother! mother! O!  
You have won a happy victory to Rome;  
But, for your son, believe it, O! believe it,  
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,  
If not most mortal to him."

What moral do we find in Shakespeare? Critics and philosophers have joined forces to discover the answer to this perplexing question. It is an interesting exercise that offers splendid opportunities for critical and philosophical

speculation—as interesting as the discovery of the philosophy of Montaigne, and as baffling. If we think of the moral as a justification of the tragic or comic fate of the hero, something that can be told on some variety of cosmic adding machine, there is none—or there are as many as there are plays and characters. Hamlet's,

“There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will,”

is as good as the last words of Brutus:

“My heart doth joy that yet, in all my life,  
I found no man but he was true to me.  
I shall have glory by this losing day,  
More than Octavius and Mark Antony  
By this vile conquest shall attain unto.  
So fare you well at once. . . .  
Night hangs upon mine eyes; my bones would rest,  
That have but labour'd to attain this hour.”

Perhaps this of Brutus is the best—a death that justifies a man's actions to himself, be the world's opinion what it will. Is not this Montaigne's thought when he says that the end of philosophy is to learn “how well to live and well to die?”

Certainly it would be a sacrilege to put into Shakespeare's mind the summary of life as Edgar recites it in *Lear*—

“The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.”

And yet in one way or another, by metaphysical aid or by theological, the moralists have been determined to discover some justification for the fate of the hero, some cosmic statistician that records in two books and according to dis-

crepancies pronounces judgment.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to tell why some fail, after the facts. Lear should not have had daughters, or having them should have kept his property. Père Goriot, in Balzac's novel, had some of the same difficulty, only his case was comic and more edifying. Hamlet should not have had a mother, or barring some difficulties, should not have loved her quite so devotedly. This again has comic and edifying possibilities—I am thinking of *Mrs. Warren's Confession*. And, yes, Macbeth should have lacked a conscience, and been a little less terrified by the supernatural unknown. It is easy to speculate in this idle manner, but it is about as far as one can go in discovering any metaphysical creed in Shakespeare.

He serves no moral. What but an utter discrepancy does one see between the lovable character of Hamlet and the terrible situation to which he awakes with shock after shock to his sensitive nature. The sudden death of his father, the light-hearted second marriage of his mother, the revelation of the ghost, bringing the terrible implication that there was no one, man or woman, whom he could trust again. What but utter cynicism, foreign to his affectionate nature, madness, or death is there for this beset hero? The tragedy is not his death, but his passionate resentment against life that has so falsely betrayed all his ideals. On what moral delinquency of the distraught prince can the justifier of tragedy as cosmic justice fasten?

<sup>1</sup> I remember the thrill Ten Brink's comments on Shakespeare's tragedies gave me as a youngster. It took me nearly ten years to recover. Goethe on Hamlet is convincing, and yet, let us hope, this is one of the occasions when this poet-critic was partly wrong. Coleridge's remarks always bulk large in the *Variorum* volumes—they deserve study. But this is not the place for a list of Shakespeare's commentators, each of whom had his tragic formula. Among late scholars Dr. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* deserves the heartiest praise. But one wonders what the poet, dramatist, part-owner of the Globe Theatre would have to say about the mass of interpretation he has been subjected to—including mine.

A courageous, sensitive youth, who overnight discovers the utter rottenness of the world in which he is living. This is the tragedy of Hamlet, his death is a release.

"Good-night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

What is the moral of *King Lear*? A kindly man who has had his own way all his life, and now suddenly in extreme old age is thwarted by those who are closest to him—they say for his own good—and to whom his wild explosions of anger but the more clearly betray his irresponsible weakness. The thing happens somewhere any day of our lives, and it is comic, save when the character has the personal grandeur of a Lear. Yes, Goneril and Regan are selfish, ambitious, cruel, even bitterly heartless and vindictive; but their motives are in part also political, and politics recognizes no kindred when it feels its power endangered. Lear was insensible to the virtues of Cordelia; but she too had been insensible to the senile pride and affection of her father, and had answered stubbornness which was old and persistent with the stubbornness of youth when youth should be pliable. She had spoiled his little play planned for the family and admiring friends, had shown a contumacious spirit when she should have read the lines set down for her in the play. And the king, now king no longer, had acted his royal and absolute part. The rest is the story, scene after scene, to show the utter inability of Lear to understand the situation to which he has reduced himself, and the heartless policy of the daughters who would put the doting old man in his place. There is no cosmic justice in *Lear*, only a discrepancy between the situation as the old man wanted it and the brute fact of the situation as he and his daughters made it.

Again, the tragedy is not the death of Lear or of Cordelia. This again is the release of a spring that has been wound too tight. She, as he, is the victim of the tragedy that comes with the perception of the intolerable paradox, king and outcast, with none to pity him save the daughter whom he had cast off and a handful of impotent followers—a fool, a disinherited youth, and an exiled nobleman. He had one glad moment of vision, almost, when things dropped into clear perspective. Yet its irony is the bitterest in the play, for both he and Cordelia are prisoners in the complete possession of the malicious powers. But in this moment his sight returns and he learns part of the truth.

“Come, let’s away to prison;  
We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage:  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we’ll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we’ll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who’s in, who’s out;  
And take upon’s the mystery of things,  
As if we were God’s Spies: and we’ll wear out,  
In a wall’d prison, packs and sets of great ones  
That ebb and flow by the moon.”

This peace is too infirm to last, and death comes as a final relief to a soul too burdened to live.

“And my poor fool is hang’d! No, no, no life!  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!  
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.  
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,  
Look there, look there!”

No cosmic justice. No moral. Nothing has been vindicated except Lear's character.

Like Montaigne, Shakespeare comes to life with no theory or philosophy that he uses experience to prove. In this he differs from the Greek tragedians. Aeschylus, the optimist, uses tragedy to vindicate the moral code of law; its absence leads to disastrous failures and catastrophes to men and kingdoms. Sophocles sees in man a moral nature that rises in resentment against the meaningless often in life, and his tragedies are a protest against life where the moral code is so frequently irrelevant. Even at the cost of disaster man stands unafraid asserting his moral nature and his demand for a moral vindication. Euripides sees man's failures in the instability of his own passionate nature, in his mental or moral defects, his lack of balance or control in difficult crises; but it is yet man's own fault that tragedy comes upon him. To the first tragedy is a vindication of the moral code, to Sophocles of man's moral nature, to Euripides a concession to man's essential weakness. But to Shakespeare it is none of these; it is the irony of life, its causes lie buried deep in the sometime maliciousness or illogical brutality of nature itself. This was the discovery that the poet made, as it was also made by the journalist philosopher. But while Montaigne observes, reads, and reflects, secure in his third floor *cabinet de travail*, Shakespeare unflinchingly pushes into the heart of the conflict of life, daring in imagination to behold the evil in its worst form face to face. Is it to be wondered at that in those sonnets, where alone he reveals in his own person his disappointments and bitter disillusionment, he breaks forth into utterance that needs no commentary?

"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,  
As, to behold desert a beggar born,

And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,  
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,  
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,  
And strength by limping sway disabled,  
And art made tongue-tied by authority,  
And folly doctor-like controlling skill,  
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,  
And captive good attending captain ill;"

In this ironical world only those who abstain from tempting the world too much are safe—the wise who will not play for high stakes and fools who have nothing wherewith to play. Prospero, who had known in his own person disaster and tragedy, now wise on his island, as in a tower, sees life as it is. Though he will go back to his kingdom, it will be with the wisdom that teaches restraint. Like the Essayist he will know that though he be mounted upon the highest throne of the world he is sitting but upon his breech.

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

And Ulysses, in *Troilus and Cressida*, the hero in a chivalric war against Troy, knows at its true worth the meaning of fame, and, like Montaigne, will not purchase it at the cost of three attacks of colic. Let the ignorant, Troilus, Hector, Achilles, Ajax, strive and show their deficiencies.

He sits behind in security and observes. He is the safe adviser.

"Welcome ever smiles,  
And farewell goes out sighing. O! let not virtue seek  
Remuneration for the thing it was;  
For beauty, wit,  
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,  
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all  
To envious and calumniating time."

By some strange compensation, Shakespeare's fools, who have nothing to lose and hence are without ambition to gamble, have the same wisdom of restraint. Their folly is shameless wisdom.

"ROSALIND. O Jupiter! how weary are my spirits.

TOUCHSTONE. I care not for my spirits if my legs were not weary."

And when the romance of the forest region finally lays hold even upon him it is with a difference. His love is no more serious than German measles.

"God 'ild you, sir; I desire you of the like. I press in here, sir, amongst the rest of the country copulatives, to swear, and to forswear, according as marriage binds and blood breaks. A poor virgin, sir, an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own: a poor humour of mine, sir, to take that that no man else will. Rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house, as your pearl in your foul oyster."

But of all farcical wise men, the prince is Falstaff. Like himself his wisdom for life is boundless, and though he profits not a whit by his deep experience in life and its ways, he has left behind a chart and compass for others.

"If I had a thousand sons, the first humane principle I would teach them should be, to forswear thin potations and to addict themselves to sack."



What were the inner workings of this man's mind? What were his views of his own escapades, when at night he communed with his pillow?—all this we can never know, for such wisdom is least communicative. But when he died in imagination he was wafted out of his sodden company;

“And a’ babbled of green fields.”

The ironic unkindness of a friend had killed even him.

A recent critic writing of Shakespeare says that his theme is “man’s inhumanity to man.” But the inhumanity goes far deeper than the casual human cruelties that are woven into every one’s existence. It is the hopelessly illogical nature of life itself, which displays itself unexpectedly in hopeless horrors. Shylock’s revenge, though there was the original gnawing resentment of Jew against Jew-baiting Christian, was not set in motion until he had suffered a fresh and domestic humiliation. That it should come just at the time when Antonio lay in his power was one of nature’s brutal coincidences. Lear’s resentment against his daughters, Hamlet’s sudden bitter disillusionment, Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s slow but passionate disintegration, Othello’s writhing under the probing of his torturer Iago: these are all examples in one way or another of man’s inhumanity, at times of his innate cruelty. But behind is the thought of an illogical world in which such stark unreason can flaunt itself, the ironical “*quantum inane in rebus*,” of which human cruelty is but a single factor. There is no motive discoverable for Iago’s fiendish delight in seeing his victim squirm—it was of his intellectual nature to seek for a reason, and he discovers the most improbable, because it fits with the nature of his supposed revenge. Nature has just such fellows who on the slightest pretext or none will pursue a delight in observing the

twitching nerve and quivering muscle. And Shylock, the affectionate father, the man who in Act I welcomed the opportunity which gave him access to a man he would have as friend, is never less Shylock than when in open court he demands the pound of flesh. He by nature is as far from the fiend as he is from the hypocrite—though he has been called both. It was the irony of life that brought out these utterly unexpected motives and illogical.

According to such a philosophy of life, man at times becomes the plaything of a situation that puts his actions quite beyond his control. Normally we are sane enough, and free to follow the habitual bent of personality. But given the opportunity, let us for the moment make the false step out of the circle of the safe, and at once we are in danger of these unexpected assaults, and their end none can predict.

The response of personality to these novel situations, this becomes Shakespeare's dramatic theme and the ironical changes, even complete transformations, that personality may undergo. Hamlet the quiet scholar gentlemen:

"The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;  
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observ'd of all observers."

When the shock of his mother's sudden marriage touches him he longs for the quiet retirement of the university, there among his scholarly friends and books to forget and find peace. This is not to be, and we find him at court surprising his mother by his cynicism and starts of passion. After the revelation of the ghost when trust in man and in woman has all been destroyed, what a shocking paradox he has become, more admirable, it is true, because of his

greater depth, but the scholar, courtier, poet, glass of fashion and mould of form is gone, and in its place the wary and eager intellectual antagonist, the disillusioned cynic longing for death. He does not even understand himself. See how he searches his mind for reasons for his apparent irresolution.

"Now, whe'r it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on the event,  
A thought, which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,  
And ever three parts coward, I do not know  
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do';  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
To do't."

He was an idealist, but now has nothing in an empty world to set up for ideals. He was a humanist, but human nature now has shown its vilest aspect.

"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither."

He was the perfect gentleman, yet now he deals in the foulest of obscenities with Ophelia, the woman he loved, and still loves. These things are not the large liberties that were allowed in speech in a franker age. They are the perfect signs of a transformed personality breaking out in a speech he before had never dreamed of. It is pathetic, it is illuminating—modern psychology can give it a scientific name—but it is yet more a glimpse at the horror of complete disillusionment that has come to a gentle and refined personality. When an occasion for swift decision

and action comes he moves with unerring purpose, this scholar gentleman, that surprises even his friend Horatio—"why, what a king is this!" But ever at his heart there is that eager clutching of things that even he cannot understand. "But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart." Such is the transformation that has come through tragedy to this once perfectly self-possessed prince. It is irony. Though drawn with fewer strokes and in a personality far less significant, the change in Ophelia is no less vital. Her frailer mind gives way under perplexed grief. Father suddenly slain, and for no motive, by her lover, who as mysteriously had gone mad. She too is refined and delicate. She was caught in a lie, and knows she had been caught. She was where she could not help herself, and fancied she was working for his cure. Abandoned by him, chided with an obscene impatience she could never understand, is it any wonder, after her father's murder, that, like sweet bells jangled out of tune, she breaks into ribald ballads she had heard somewhere in her childhood. Both Hamlet and Ophelia have their world, seemingly so firm, suddenly shattered, and both have nothing to put in its place. To one comes madness and a pathetic death, to the other comes tragic bewilderment and search, and a sole comfort in a perfect friendship with Horatio. His friend might have saved him, had brute accident not been forehanded. Hamlet's love alone could have saved her.

The utter transformation, passionate disintegration, of the character of Macbeth. A loyal subject, honorable, ambitious, a brave general and resourceful, there is everything to attract us in this downright character, and he makes friends with all. Only one failing, but that is a virtue, his ambition. Suddenly metaphysical aid and a trustful king put the weapon in his hand. He shrinks from

the deed, for his imagination, poetic in its power to call up the terrifying picture, falters:—

“That but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We’d jump the life to come . . .

. . . . .

. . . Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongu’d against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubin, hors’d  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.”

But his wife is stronger in resolution than he. She can by sheer force of will face down the rising conscience.

“I have given suck, and know  
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn as you  
Have done to this.”

When he comes with bloody hands from the business of death, how shaken he is:

“There’s one did laugh in’s sleep, and one cried ‘Murder!’  
That they did wake each other: I stood and heard them;  
But they did say their prayers, and address’d them  
Again to sleep. . . .

One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other:  
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands,  
Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen',  
When they did say 'God bless us!' "

But her fine scorn lashes him. She is playing for high stakes, and is as cool as a practiced gambler.

"Infirm of purpose!

Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood  
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,  
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;  
For it must seem their guilt."

Only a chance resemblance brings her a moment's panic.  
"Had he not resembled my father as he slept I had done't."

And when the bloody business is over, the calm with which she rallies his disordered spirits, bringing him to self-possession, so that in the next scene he is outwardly quite himself and master of the situation. There is something superbly fine in the splendid comradeship between these two powerful creatures, he the nervous hand, and the finely tempered imagination, she the cool head that drives with inflexible purpose. Even as late as the scene at the banquet, when the spectre of Banquo comes with fateful irony to the table in response to the king's toast, the queen is quick to avert calamity, distract the attention of the guests, and calm the shaken husband.

But the companionship, once so perfect, breaks first. Between them lies the murdered Duncan, and across his corpse their mutual affection finds it harder and harder to pass. After her brave defense of him to the guests, she is broken but yet calm. There is no word of complaint, no word of anything, except the laconic, "You lack the

season of all natures, sleep." But sleep has worse horrors than the hours of wakefulness. It was Macbeth's first agony of apprehension:

"Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!  
Macbeth doth murder sleep,' the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast."

And its tortures are the cause of her collapse. She is the first to break, a lonely, disillusioned woman. She thought to deny her womanhood, "Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts! Unsex me here." But though she may subdue for a moment her woman's kindliness, it wakes when her will is relaxed. And she dies, a victim of her own conflicts. This is the ironic comment on her first exultation,

"Put  
This night's great business into my dispatch;  
Which shall to all our nights and days to come  
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

But Macbeth by the experience, which first leaves him shaken, is ironically hardened into the tyrant. "Blood will have blood." Yes, and though he may still the voice of conscience, he can never quite allay his imaginative horror of the unknown ministers that destroy men's peace. Of the fatal illness of his wife he can only exclaim:

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?"

But the emptiness of the world he has purchased so dearly.  
He had played and won the prize, but lost everything that  
made the prize worth having.

"My way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,  
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."

Life itself has now no meaning:

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

This is the ironic tragedy of Macbeth, not his death, nor hers, but the apples of Sodom they picked when they reached for the crown of ambition. It is not a play where a cosmic justice smites, and the reader sees the justice and is edified. It is the picture of disintegrating personality under the pressure of unnatural passion. Death was the only sleep each could discover.

With a philosophy of life far more trenchant than the musings on a summer vacation of a Jaques, with a very real conviction that to venture beyond the narrow circle of the safe limitations of humanity invited the malicious irony of the gods, what compensation has Shakespeare found for



tragedy? Only great personality may dare the issue of tragedy, for only the great can enter the lists against the powers of the unknown. And it is the revelation of humanity put to the edge, reserving itself for the supreme test, and expending itself in magnificent failure, it is this that brings the gasp of admiration with the shudder of terror and the stretching appeal of pity. It is not Macbeth the murderer and villain that comes to us in the agony of his resentful disillusionment, it is the agony of the poetic soul that was paying a price far different from the one the wilfulness of his action should exact. In a world gone suddenly black with terrifying forces he cannot comprehend, his imagination gathers strength and soars to heights of pained ecstasy. The depths of human nature and its heights, revealed by suffering and bafflement, this is the recompense of tragedy.

Lear calling upon the heavens fittingly to celebrate his agony, Othello lashing himself into a passion of jealousy, yet by nature ironically the least liable to its tooth, exclaiming when about to strangle his wife, "Iago, the pity of it, Iago". Hamlet calm, yet with all ill about his heart, going bravely to his death, with passionate self-possession. Only twice does his nature give way and both times before his love for Ophelia, when he takes his farewell, and when he sees her body laid in the grave. Lear, Macbeth, Othello reveal their power through the magnificent sweep of poetic passion: Hamlet his through the very calmness of self-possession. The issues of tragedy are great, for in it the irony that lies at the heart of life stands revealed. But it takes us out of the world of the safe and commonplace into a region where great dangers abound.

It is this thought, I believe, that Shakespeare played with when in the *Tempest* he took his leave of the stage,

and wrote his confession of faith, and an allegory of life itself. If we can trust the dates it was written when he, like Prospero, like Montaigne, had retired from the world of affairs, and found himself a magic island, like a tower, from which he too could look safely at life and estimate its values and dangers. It is again a comedy, as life must appear to him who contemplates it thoughtfully, but an allegorical comedy, with, like Dante's universe, three regions—an upper, a middle, and a sinister lower.

Prospero, the banished duke, now on the island, is humanity that has known tragedy and suffered and learned wisdom. His actions are limited to the little world of the island, and his desires there to cultivate the private affection of domesticity. There is something wholly sweet in this picture of Prospero and the untouched loveliness of Miranda—her name is symbolic of the wonder of youth that looks abroad while sheltered affectionately at home, youth tiptoe with hope and expectation ready to try the wings of romantic imagination. But Prospero is wise—his island retreat touches both the supernal and the sinister, Ariel and Caliban, and within wise limits he makes both serve him. Ariel is the power of imaginative poetry.

"All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure; be 't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curl'd clouds: to thy strong bidding task  
Ariel and all his quality."

He is served also by the sinister powers of evil and brute force, of sensuous brutishness, Caliban, with wonder and at times admiration, and always hate.

"You taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,  
For learning me your language!"

Caliban is the illogical, but he must serve reason; he is in the presence of beauty he would soil, but may not touch, so closely is he watched.

It is not a safe island, life is never safe even in the Tower, ever there must be the wariest of watch, for even the sprightly Ariel is restive, and Caliban always sullen. Only wisdom can keep these two antipathetic powers carefully separate—ironically paradoxical forces these, so liable to play fast and loose with each other, and bring human reason under their spell, to its undoing.

Then the world bursts in on the island. For youthful Miranda must likewise know life, not from an affectionate distance, but by going forth to live. How skillfully the poet's allegory proceeds. How beautiful the romance of unspoiled youth. Appropriately Caliban finds his kind, and brutishly leads them to his revenge; appropriately those of higher intelligence are fostered by Ariel; under the power all of guiding wisdom.

Appropriately too, the poem closes, with the poet's farewell to his art. Both Caliban and Ariel now dismissed, his mind cleared, his conscience at peace, youth and romance set forth on its own adventure. First there is an apostrophe to life, the greatest ironical illusion of all, as the wise man sees life. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." Then the quiet, but resolute taking up of the duties of a narrower region where without Caliban and Ariel, even without romance, the man may pass his last days in peace.

"Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own;  
Which is most faint."



### XIII. THE MODERN GENTLEMAN

#### MOLIÈRE AND THE AGE OF LOUIS XIV

"Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things that are connected with manners and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion." EDMUND BURKE.

IN spite of the fourteenth of July and the Republic, France looks back with a peculiar pride upon the days of the *Ancien Régime* and the glories of *Louis le Grand*. The tradition of Versailles, the palace he built, the *Comédie Française* that came to its own in his reign, the Academy that achieved its literary dictatorship under his patronage, the influence of these royal institutions goes far beyond any later constitutions or popular assemblies, beyond even the tradition of the Revolution. And there is a singular halo that has gathered, like a blessed mist, obscuring the unpleasantnesses, about the figure of the great Louis, the *Roi Soleil*, the sun king, the galaxy of courtiers about his throne, those magnificent creatures the courtesans, the pride of episcopal eloquence, the crown of literary genius, the gorgeous pageantry of ribbons, feathers, and manners that made the life of the court a thing that thrills even a democratic imagination. Examined under a historical microscope the flaws and the wrinkles under the paint are only too apparent; but what imagination, even in the days

of Montespan and Rambouillet, ever saw the magnificent reign as other than magnificent?

A great change had taken place since the quarrelsome days of Michel de Montaigne. The civil disturbances had now subsided, and thanks to the genius of the great Cardinal Richelieu, the power of the king in the kingdom was now supreme. The civil wars and the Fronde were things of the past, and to provide against their recurrence the king summoned all his great nobles to court. Paris was to be the heart of the kingdom, the king its central jewel, and the nobility an encircling garland of gems to add to the central lustre. Overnight almost, France, that is, articulate France, became urban; country life disappeared, and it was only on the boulevards of Paris, in the salons of the nobles and the king, that life might be met worthy of one's study. Gentlemen became courtiers: if they were by profession soldiers, at the close of a campaign they doffed their muddy boots and appeared in the royal retinue. To live in the provinces was to live a purgatorial existence away from the grace and light of each refining presence. One went to one's estates to recoup his fallen finances, not to live. The term *vacances* had not yet been invented. Life had become refined to the ideal of an orderly court. This was the day when the word *etiquette*, a label, came to mean those distinguishing marks that set off the urbane man.

The women, ladies now, likewise had undergone some change in the new regime. They are important now—but when have they not been important?—as providing for life a consciously new motive. With the courtier now deprived of all real responsibility, and life reduced to a ritual of manners, intrigue became something more than a pastime, it was elevated into a profession with a code and ritual as elaborate as the ritual of the court, indeed this became

one of the absorbing rituals. Read the memoirs of that remarkable woman Mme. de Sévigné. Even a woman of intellect must submit to its demands. She must become a creature of moods, of *vapeurs*, of *migraines*. She must be coy like the spider, and entice man, the fly, without ostentation, and seem to flee when she is most in earnest, and have a coming-on disposition when her heart is least engaged. She developed the art of indirect conversation, burying meaning under a weight of discourse, as elaborate as those creations of wire, machinery, and ornament that were her dress. You had to belong to be at home in one of her salons, and it took time and much arduous practice, as Molière's plays will tell you, to discipline word, dress, gesture, and expression to make one acceptable. It was the day of direct indirections.

Etiquette, the life of the gentleman and lady, is hedged by its rules—a hierarchy of manners, leading up to the carefully mannered life of the king, the *Roi Soleil*, whose rising and setting, whose whole glorious orbit swept into order and reverence the lives of all France. An inch to the depth of a bow, like an inch to the length of a ribbon or the laced frill of a cuff, these were things that mattered supremely, and one must know. Titles of respect, manners of address, tones of one's voice—variations from the code were as sinful as a dishonest act. It seems ridiculous to us in this day of an open season on manners to think of grown men and women of attainment, bowing before the empty bed of a king—some now find it difficult even to bow in reverence before the symbol of martyred humanity. But it was not all ridiculous, far from it; a ridiculous age would not have produced a Molière or a Racine or a La Fontaine, or the conquering generals that made nearly all Europe tributary to this much-bowed-to king. It was

deadly serious, and these bowings and posturings, and these phrases that seemed to require the most elaborate manner to say the simplest of things, had about them something that our downright life to-day may be suspected of missing.

It was manners; manners not as an empty code, but manners as an ideal. Society is a vast organism, and to keep it sweet-tempered, especially when it lives together closely, a device to prevent friction must be invented. So a code of manners is always like the oil in a complicated machine, a lubricant wholly necessary if the machine is to run smoothly — nothing in itself, but everything if it be lacking. When the social life is elaborate there will always be its code of manners; when the social life is closely centralized the code will be correspondingly exaggerated, and at times to an outsider perhaps meaningless.

But there is still something more to be said of good manners. They are always devised to be somehow an expression of the inner personality, and their gesture an inner symbolism. To take off one's hat to a woman may in most cases to-day be utterly meaningless, and there are women, I am told, who resent it as a reflection on the equality of the sexes. Be that as it may, once it had a very definite meaning, and has even in some dark quarters to-day. It was a beautiful act, symbolical of something hugely personal and intimate. The man of good manners was the cultivated gentleman, whose inner culture found expression in a perfect grace of external act. He was the gentleman—what the age of Louis XIV called the *honnête homme*.

Of course we should expect, and not be prompt to criticize when we find, that in an age so closely brought to the throne of the monarch there should be a singular uniformity of type. The effort was precisely to repeat the type, to make

the ideal of the gentleman and his courtly manners prevail. Hence the large number of books on the necessary instruction for the gentleman, and the arts with which he must be familiar. Hence the large gallery of portraits of those who offend; we see these in the *Contes* and *Fables* of La Fontaine, in the *Caractères* of La Bruyère, in the tragedies of Racine, and above all in the comedies of Molière. They, in those days, knew better what they did not want, than precisely what went into the ingredients of *honnêteté*, but the search nevertheless was diligently plied, and the definition of the gentleman was felt to be not too abstruse to be attempted.

He must be a man of breeding—it was unthinkable then that a Benjamin Franklin could in his own lifetime gain the inner and outer polish that would entitle him to a place near the throne of princes. It must require, they fancied, many generations of careful selection to produce the mind and body of the gentleman of the true temper. This will provide the soil. Then must come the most careful training of the intelligence and emotions. One of the things that at the time was considered as of utmost significance was purity in language. We must remember that the modern European languages, and especially literary French, had just rescued themselves from the confusion of the many dialects; that they were just beginning to feel they had powers and traditions of their own; and that scholars and gentlemen needed no longer have recourse to the old Latin when they wanted singular polish and permanence for their speech. The French Academy was founded for this very purpose in the generation preceding, and rhetoricians or rather grammarians, like Vaugelas, were highly popular individuals in the salons, to help aspiring courtiers to rid themselves of any provincial deficiencies in speech. One



could not speak like a Gascon or an Alsatian and hope for social success in the circles of Paris.

The gentleman must have a trained judgment, founded upon a thorough study of the classics, and especially Latin. They were not the authors that Montaigne commended, but rather more a heavy sprinkling of the poets, especially those that had what might be called a nose for discovering social virtues and vices. Horace was popular. So were Persius and Juvenal. It was an urbane literature they wanted, and they got the best in the most urbane literature of Rome. In it they sought a trained judgment to discern and act quickly upon social values—again manners. But learning must rest lightly on these urbane shoulders; there must be no undue show of it—no pedantry—they were not professors, and resented the manners of mere scholarship. It must be worn like their best costumes as an ornament that accentuated the lines and expression of the body, but must never call attention to itself. It was rich but never ostentatious.

The same lack of ostentation must above all be seen in personal habits and manners. And it is here that our ideas of the age are often most misleading. We think of the numerous fops, the gallants, the *précieux*, who courted ostentation and made a parody of manners and speech and dress—those whom Molière was never tired of caricaturing—and think of the age as given over to elaborate ribbons and lace, and to unintelligible intelligibility in speech. He must be modest in dress and speech and action, the gentleman. This was quite a change from the swash-buckling age before, that of the *Three Musketeers* and the Corneillian heroes, who gloried in self-expression and eccentricity of manner. Self-love must be banished, or at least held in restraint, and conceit. It became improper to use even

the first person in speech—"Le moi est haïssable," wrote Pascal; instead they substituted the indefinite "on," one. The gentleman must avoid conspicuousness, even in speaking of himself; and above all such as comes from eccentricity, even if the motive for eccentricity be an admirable one. Molière's *Misanthrope* is eccentric not only because he hates the parade of honesty and the reality of fraud, but also because he shows this virtue in such a manner as to make him wholly ridiculous to polite society.

This desire to avoid ostentation or eccentricity went even so far as to discourage laughter. I think it was largely because his plays were so farcically ridiculous and at them laughter held both its sides, that the comic manners of Aristophanes were not encouraged, and Terence rather than Plautus or Aristophanes became the model of the comic poet. Also for the same reason Boileau, that austere satirist and often wise critic, passed a left-handed compliment on Molière's farces. Gentlemen must not laugh. "It is such a frightful distortion of the face." I think it was Lord Chesterfield who wrote this, a faithful follower of the French manner, and it was La Rochefoucauld who repentantly confessed that he had laughed three or four times in his life.

Perhaps the finest thing about this ideal is its honest intellectual tolerance. Perhaps this is best seen in the poetry of La Fontaine. The age produced a deal of very serious independent thinking. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of its literary or philosophical history. But men's minds were alert to ideas. There was a quarrel partly inherited from the preceding century between the Jansenists of Port Royal—a somewhat Puritanical and austere Catholic sect—and the Jesuits. Under other circumstances the thing might have come to serious

consequences, for men were yet slitting one another's throats about religious differences. But though there was a deal of acrid pamphleteering, the ideal of the gentleman prevailed, and at court, at least, the differences were tolerantly allowed to take care of themselves. Only Protestantism was not tolerated. The gentleman was a person guided by reason and knew the *juste milieu*, the golden mean—a thought stolen from Aristotle. He knew better than to go to any extremes, knowing that the pursuit of anything to the point of the neglect of other essentials, resulted in a lack of perfect balance. For every eccentricity, good or bad, means a lack of proportion, and hence a poor adjustment to the world of ideas and society. So curiously unbalanced characters like the Misanthrope were condemned, and like them any narrow specialized professional. I especially like this from Pascal, who perhaps as well as any might be used as the type of the cultivated gentleman.

"Really one should never be able to say 'he is a mathematician' or 'he is a pulpit orator,' or 'eloquent,' but 'he is a gentleman' (*honnête homme*). This universal character alone pleases me. When in meeting a man one thinks of his books, it is a bad sign. . . . Man is full of all kinds of needs; I love only those who can satisfy all. 'He is a good mathematician,' some one will say. But in this case I shall have to do with nothing but mathematics; he will take me for a geometrical proposition. 'He is a good warrior'; he will take me for a place under siege. I need a gentleman who can accommodate himself without exception to all my needs."

This is intellectual tolerance with a philosophy to commend it.

And back they went to Montaigne for the foundations of their philosophy. The world at best is an insecurity; it is so easy to loose one's grip, so easy to find oneself play-

ing with false or exaggerated ideas, or out of step with society—I think it was this last that was most dreaded, for never were the social needs of man more adequately felt. Only reason can keep a man tolerant, open-mindedly curious, and good-manneredly alert to the needs of others. Hence anything that might disturb this supremacy of the reason was to be sharply condemned; and above all those uncontrolled explosions we call passion and imagination. The one is the result often of the other. Above all keep the imagination under careful control, and avoid the penalty of wild passion. That way lies tragedy. Such is the thought that throughout governs the work of Racine.

Again I like to quote from Pascal that inexhaustible mine of seventeenth century thought, perhaps the best the century afforded, but like a mine again in that his gems lie scattered in the disorderly fragments of his *Pensées*:

“For finally what is this creature man in respect to nature? A zero in comparison with infinity, everything compared with zero; a something about midway between zero and infinity. At a distance too great to understand either extreme, the end of things as their beginnings are for him inevitably buried in an impenetrable secret, equally incapable of understanding the zero from which he is drawn, or the infinity in which he loses himself.

“Behold such is our true estate; something that makes us incapable either of perfect knowledge or of perfect ignorance. . . . Such is our natural state, and yet ever quite at odds with our inclinations; we burn with desire to discover some firm ground, and a lasting foundation on which to erect a tower reaching to the heavens, but the whole foundation cracks and the ground opens to the abyss.

“When I think of this brief space of my life, lost in the eternity of the past and of the future, the little space I fill and which alone I see, an abyss in the immensity of space that I know not and that knows not me, I stand terrified and amazed to see myself here rather than elsewhere, for there is not the slightest of reason for the here rather than for the elsewhere, or for the now rather than for some other time. Who has

put me here? By whose command and warrant was this time and this place ordained for me? . . . The silence eternal of these infinite spaces terrifies."

It was to guide one's feet in this narrow world of ideas and society that man's frail reason was given. That other faculty, the imagination, is dangerous for it ever longs to escape into the terrifying spaces of the unknown and unknowable. See Pascal again: The imagination "is the power of deception in man, a mistress of error and of falsehood, and all the more untrustworthy because she is not so always; for she would be the infallible guide to truth if she were infallible against lies. But being more frequently false, she never gives the least sign of her genuineness, ticketing alike the true and the false."

There is something splendidly austere in this magnificent gesture of renunciation of the imagination—another age is going to call it back as feelingly, and crown it as the mistress of truth. But this century, following Montaigne, has few illusions on the possibility of ultimate truth. It will be satisfied if it does not stumble in the dark nor lose its way to its more humble habitation of a good-mannered human society. The gentleman will not trouble himself over the insoluble. The gentleman will not "disturb himself unduly over anything."

For this is what distinguished the gentleman from the uncultivated, the socially acceptable man from the barbarian,—he was disciplined, and knew the wise limits of all his activities. It was an aristocratic ideal, the most aristocratic ever cultivated—an ideal society with its ideal hierarchy. An intelligent and cultivated prince, to serve as the central sun to his orders of planets, each in its orbit, moving without friction in elegant and reasonable manners about its centre of gravity. There was royalty, the nobility,

the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry, each in the place marked out for it by a reasonable nature, and each fulfilling its natural function with sweet reason. And the institutions of court, city, and state, like the academy or the salons, were drawn to lay down and define the lines of elegant procedure. All externally at least was as beautiful as a geometrical theorem. One can't quarrel with the ideal.

It was a time too when literature and especially poetry was sedulously cultivated. Of all, the drama became the central object of public interest, and resort to the plays was a part of the liturgy of court and city. And never was the dramatic art more exquisitely studied by scholar and poet. For this form of art best gives the spectacle of human reason and unreason, and in it most easily may the reasonable man find edification and reproof. This vehicle for court edification and pleasure must in its rules and procedure be as much above reproach as the gentlemen that sat on the benches to see the play, or the author who almost in the spirit of religion sat down to write. For it was a critical audience and a critical crew of authors, all with a technical knowledge of the finer points of the art. Or, to put it in one word, it was an age of Taste; good taste, and, as they fancied, the best taste that the world hitherto had ever known.

There is no form of art that requires for its cultivation the niceties of a social code as does comedy, and especially the comedy of manners. And the more refined the code the more subtle will be the comic spirit. When Aristophanes was writing, Greece was naturally interested more in persons and ideas, for these were the dangerous days of the Peloponnesian War; in consequence his comedy is more exclusively directed to the exploitation of ideas or the

criticism of persons and policies. But here in these days of the absolute Louis XIV, the exploitation of public themes was naturally out of the question. They were for ministers and cabinets. The theme for polite conversation was polite society and its ways, and comedy turned to the discussion of manners. The departures from the code may be only too obvious, and from the more obvious and simple rules of the code. Here we shall have farce, as in Molière's *Précieuses Ridicules*, where the whole fun is at the expense of two romantically brain-sick young ladies who have decided they will be courted by none except such as have the ultra-refined manners of their ultra-polite fiction. The result is a farce of unutterably extravagant polite conversation. Or the thing under examination may be a more subtle and flagrant violation of the manners of a gentleman. For example, *Tartuffe*, where the most dangerous of social pests, the hypocrite, is portrayed for us in his most sinister manner. Farce and comedy of manners are often only lower and higher forms of the same spirit. Hence at first reading there is a seeming narrowness of theme in Molière.

But to do what Molière did required a careful study of the life of his time; and to make his personages something more than mere types of social eccentricities, the danger that is ever ready for the social satirist, it required in addition a deep understanding of human personality. Perhaps for his time, as for Shakespeare's, this could only come, for the person of meaner birth, from the stage. At least Goethe in his *Wilhelm Meister* prescribes the professional stage for his hero who wishes to know life, and who on account of his bourgeois family, is of course barred from the circles of the most polished. Molière took to the stage early, though his father had other ideas, and traveled with

a touring company, when the theatres of Paris were closed to him—this was no bad thing either, for with all of its brilliancy Paris was not France. He really was an excellent actor, and like Shakespeare again, might have been content to shine in his profession, but for the itch of creative authorship. He knew too much about the human world beyond the footlights, and he must drag it on to the boards that others too might see how ridiculous people are at times, and even some very pretentious people, to an intelligent man who knows how to mimic them in their thoughts and actions. Comedy must be superbly intelligent, and Molière's wits were of the keenest. In one thing he was better than Shakespeare, he failed only once, so sure was the brain that guided the hand that taught the actors.

Nor is his range of comic character and comic situations so narrow as his restricted theme would lead us to expect. Though somewhat beside our path, those are sparkling rogues, his Scapins, to whom Boileau so austere objected, his Sganarelle, borrowed from the Italian, perhaps, but given a thoroughly new suit of clothes and vocabulary, and above all that grandiloquent, magnificent Mascarille, whose imposture is so convincing that he convinces even himself. You cannot find better farce comedy than this anywhere. Even Falstaff would have to use all his wit to keep himself recognized in this aristocracy of the intelligently ridiculous. If properly disposed laughter crowns the creator's head with the halo of wisdom—as Cervantes has suggested—if it takes a wise man to write pertinently of fools, then certainly Molière deserves the crown.

But it is not by his farce, great as it is both on and off the stage, that Molière and his comedies live. True comedy must go deeper, and its mask of carefree laughter is worn



only to hide the face of wisdom; great comedy has ever been exceeding wise and wary—and, to the foolish, difficult of access. See the range first of this man's laughter at the lapses from the ideal of the gentleman. *Amphitryon* was a theme easy and congenial to Plautus in the days after the myths of the gods had become somewhat stiff through unbelief. The god Jupiter has fallen in love with Alcmena the wife of king Amphitryon, and to compass his love he assumes the appearance of her absent husband. Mercury to aid takes the guise of Sosia the servant. We have here all the ingredients of a good "comedy of errors" with the prize a woman's person, and the theme utter bewilderment. It is good rollicking fun in Plautus. Gods have a way with them, and injured husbands and wives may well content themselves with the implied compliment, "the thing is of a god." But with Molière the theme now becomes broadly allegorical. The fun is there, the farce, and Sosia is of the best, the real and the divine, but the easily turned reference to one of Louis' amours, and the utterly fine resentment of Alcmena at the trick put upon her—this is not quite of the same piece. She might have been proud of the illicit amour, had she known and her consent been properly won; but to entertain a god unaware—this is not quite the game of gallantry as played by the gentleman even of the time of the Grand Monarch. Jupiter comes off with some of his lustre lost, and it is the distressed Alcmena who finally gives the spirit to the play. I wonder if secretly Louis liked the plot, as Molière put it up for him.

Or take that inimitable thing that will never lose its power—the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Here is a theme universal, only the costumes need alteration to make it as true in New York or Tokyo as in seventeenth century Paris. Poor Jourdain who has accomplished a fortune, now it

would be in Texas oil, finds his heart craves social prestige, for he is only a common Paris business man with no background of culture. It is all very sad, and he goes about it with terrible seriousness, just as he had gone about making his millions. But contrary to the modern procedure his wife and daughter are unaffected by this new craze. Molière's women are usually sensible. Jourdain hires a needy nobleman, gets him professionals to give him polish in athletics, music, and dancing, and someone to teach him the rudiments of good speech. He even goes so far in his infatuation as to find it necessary to have a noble mistress for whom verses should be composed and valuable gifts discovered. His daughter must make a noble match, while she is dreaming only of a good bourgeois neighbor, a sensible and resourceful youth. Into this pretty mess one can crowd as much fooling as one may wish, and the thing is hilariously funny. But under it all is the bewildered, sober face of the pathetic M. Jourdain, who discovers that he has talked prose all his life and must continue to do so until the end. You can't by taking thought after middle age make a marquis out of yourself, but you can be a modest, true-hearted, and valuable business man with a contented family.

So goes Molière taking a ridiculous situation and after the laughter discovering in it a gold-mine of ideas on the character of the true gentleman, and the aberrations by which it is so easy to lose one's way. Gradually these situations, as his power matured, became less and less ridiculous and the serious meaning of the poet more obvious. His only failure was on just this variety of theme—his *Don Juan*. There he had something that faintly suggests the comic side of Goethe's *Faust*—the youth with no illusions in search of perpetual sense gratification. Don Juan loves

and abandons every girl he meets, and he has no belief in religion; he might have become the symbol of the man without faith and with only the itch of personal pleasure to drive him to live. But this Don Juan succeeds poorly in making love, he is quite unprofessional, to two village wenches, and finally gets into trouble because of impiety. The age would hardly allow it—and Molière's philosophy is too purely human and social, to permit a real Don Juan.

The *Femmes Savantes* is one of his best. Here is one of his most powerful social plays. The family of Chrysale has become hopelessly divided. He is a good *bourgeois* who wants nothing but a good home and a happy family.

"Now, your everlasting books  
 Don't suit me. Just save out a big old Plutarch  
 To press my neck-bands in, and burn the rest.  
 Leave learning to the Doctors of the town;  
 And throw away, if you'd be sensible,  
 That great long frightful spy-glass in our attic,  
 And scores of other ugly-looking gimcracks;  
 Don't be so keen to see what's done i' the moon,  
 But mind a bit what's doing in your house  
 Where everything goes topsy-turvy."

But his wife and one of his two daughters have been hopelessly taken by the new learning, and have become "new women." They despise household tasks, and think with disdain of the younger sister Henrietta who wants nothing but a good husband, a home, and children. It is distressing. The mother and elder sister have determined upon a worthier match than the choice of the father and Henrietta, a savant who speaks their language and can thus give the family the needed intellectual lustre. The impasse is final. Here we have all the professionalism, intolerance, and display of bad temper that the gentle mind must learn

to abhor, and yet these women aspire to be gentle. And the bitterness is increased by the elder sister, Armande's secret jealousy of Henrietta's success in love. Here a thoroughly good man's peace of mind and that of his dutiful daughter is being sacrificed to a whim, that though worthy runs counter to reason and good sense. That the play ends with a reasonable compromise, does not answer the problem—it is one of those social blights whose effects can never be removed. You laugh at the ridiculous pretensions of the ridiculous, but you know that to them they are deadly serious, and not to be wholly condemned.

His greatest plays thus take up the major eccentricities that undermine the family and society, serious departures from what is socially correct and valuable. It is only rarely that his eyes go far beyond the unit of the family, for upon its welfare depends that of society at large—at least such was the conviction of the seventeenth as well as of the nineteenth century. It is thus that he attacks the miser in *L'Avare*. Again he went to Plautus for his theme, but while the Latin poet made the miser only ridiculous Molière makes him also sinister. Harpagon is a man and has feelings—these Plautus ignored—he is in some respects almost pathetic, not in his love of wealth, but in his recognition of the fact that this his major passion has cut him off from even his family. He is so convinced that he is right that he endures this martyrdom with sad fortitude. What more should be asked of a man? And when he falls in love—as the foolish old fellow did in search for some human tie—he does it with a dowerless girl. This last is a stroke of genius, a miser Simon-pure would have asked a marriage with a dowry; here he quite steps out of his rôle.

But he has wrecked the fortunes of his family. His son and daughter have their natural affections, yet he plays

fast and loose with them, using his children like pawns or like bait for his own mercenary designs; until the play becomes the quarrel between youth and age, the one hard and grasping, the other tender, eager, and affectionate. And how shall it end? Molière is no master of miracle as was Dickens who with a wave of his hand, and a dream or a journey to Australia, can turn Scrooge into benevolence and Micawber into a pattern of sobriety. This fairy-wand the French realist refuses to wield. The play ends in a compromise managed by the wit of injured youth; but youth remains youth, eager, passionate, and idealistic; and age remains age, shorn of some of its power perhaps, and chastened a trifle by defeat, but grasping age, with its master passion yet untouched. Comedy? Yes, hearty and at times farcical.

“ANSELME. Signior Harpagon, . . . come, do not compel me to say what there is no need for you to hear, but give your consent, as I do mine, to the double marriage.

HARPAGON. To be well advised, I must see my strong-box.

CLEANTE. You shall see it safe and sound.

HARPAGON. I have no money to give my children in marriage.

ANSELME. Well! I have enough for them. Do not let that trouble you.

HARPAGON. Will you promise to pay all the expenses of both weddings?

ANSELME. Yes, I promise. Are you satisfied?

HARPAGON. Yes, provided you will order me a suit of clothes for the ceremony.

ANSELME. Very well. And now let us enjoy the delight which this happy day brings us.”

But there is the smile of bitterness at the uselessness of dreaming of a perfect society when there are incurable Harpagons on every street.

More sinister, and more far-reaching in his malign in-

fluence is Tartuffe, perhaps Molière's greatest creation. There are two Tartuffes, or better two ways of looking at this monster of hypocrisy, the most deadly of human vices. To those who look only superficially he is ridiculous in the large discrepancy between profession and character. Thus he appears to Dorine, and thus he will appear to most of the spectators in the gallery. The man who will do penance because he killed a louse while at prayers is ridiculous; so also is the gorgeous gourmand of this scene:

“ORGON (to Dorine). Has everything gone well these last two days?

What's happening? And how is everybody?

DORINE. Madam had fever, and a splitting headache

Day before yesterday, all day and evening.

ORGON. And how about Tartuffe?

DORINE. Tartuffe? He's well;

He's mighty well; stout, fat, fair, rosy-lipped.

ORGON. Poor man!

DORINE. At evening she had nausea

And couldn't touch a single thing for supper,

Her headache still was so severe.

ORGON. And how

About Tartuffe?

DORINE. He supped alone, before her,

And unctuously ate up two partridges,

As well as half a leg o' mutton, deviled.

ORGON. Poor man!”

He is ridiculous, even farcical, this fellow who just before he attempts the seduction of his host's wife, greets the serving maid with this gratuitous advice:

“TARTUFFE (speaking to his valet, off the stage, as soon as he sees Dorine is there)

Lawrence, put up my hair-cloth shirt and scourge,  
And pray that Heaven may shed its light upon you.  
If any come to see me, say I'm gone  
To share my alms among the prisoners.

DORINE (aside). What affectation and what showing off!

TARTUFFE. What do you want with me?

DORINE. To tell you . . .

TARTUFFE (taking a handkerchief from his pocket). Ah!

Before you speak, pray take this handkerchief.

DORINE. What?

TARTUFFE Cover up that bosom, which I can't

Endure to look on. Things like that offend

Our souls, and fill our minds with sinful thoughts."

But Tartuffe is also sinister, and the more so because he is so perfectly cast for the part he is playing. He may be gross, but he is a polished courtier in his desires and his speech. He may have come in rags, but now he wears his gown like a prince; and the manner of his approach to the family of his victim has all the astuteness of perfect assurance. Orgon, the husband and father, had been born into a somewhat severe family. He had distinguished himself in the wars, had married and brought up a family, a boy and a girl, and then when his children were at a marriageable age his wife had died. He married again, this time a charming young woman, Elmire, of excellent family and cultivated taste. Immediately into the family, that had been colorless and severe, there came life and beauty. The children open like flowers, but Orgon's heart is troubled by these calls and balls and parties. He is ready for Tartuffe. And Tartuffe comes, austere, and pious to a degree beyond cavil. He becomes Orgon's conscience striving to atone for the delinquencies of home, wife, and children.

But the villain over-reaches himself. Utterly confident now of his power, and in spite of the fact that Orgon has deeded him the whole of his property and is about to give him his daughter as wife, Tartuffe proceeds to fall in love, sincerely, with Elmire; and the whole house tumbles about

his ears. The irony of it! Successful in each of his hypocrisies, it is only when he is wholly sincere that he makes a false step. But such is the irony of life, as Shakespeare also saw life. It is not an act of poetic justice here, the wickedness does not accumulate until the measure is full and the gods strike. Quite the contrary, there is even something almost pathetic in his sincere love making to the woman—he had been offered the child, but his taste was aristocratic. Yet it was also the crowning villainy in his violation of the code of social good manners. Such is the sinister Tartuffe. To-day he might not parade as a religious saint, but he is the finest of great confidence-men in literature.

Even more subtle is the fine character of Alceste in the *Misanthrope*. Here surely we have a gentleman in thought and action; what is there about him that the genius of comedy finds laughable? And to-day with our more elastic code of manners Alceste is not laughable, he is almost, like Hamlet, tragic; for a rare spirit like his, so delicately sensitive, finds this world utterly at variance with his ideals. But he lacked tolerance, even tolerance with human weakness. Like Hamlet, Alceste is too good for his age; and, when the stress of the comic situation comes, he cannot bend to the storm. He is a gentleman whom all love and admire. The fact that he has the love of three women, one at least of whom is wholly admirable, shows his genuine attractiveness. The additional fact that a stranger marquis, who in a fit of inspiration has written a sonnet, wishes Alceste's judgment on it, shows his taste and his wide circle of unknown admirers. Certainly he is the last person before the play opens who deserves the title of misanthrope. Philinte, his friend, is also the last person in the world to give such friendship without some



reason, and he sticks to his admiring friendship even to the bitter end. Such is the hero when the play opens.

And the course of the play is the series of shocks coming in such rapid succession that Alceste does not have time to regain his balance. He is bludgeoned, and each time by an utterly unexpected opponent. The first scene finds him suffering from the disillusioning effect of a lawsuit that has unjustly been brought against him by supposed friends; and in his violent resentment he declares that he will not soil his hands in the dirty business, let them take his property; a just man like him will not enter into an unjust quarrel. Instead he will be a martyr to show an evil world what true gentlemanly conduct is. Doubtless he would have recovered, given time. But before the anger has passed, there comes lightly tripping into his presence an exquisite, a marquis, a stranger, who begs that Alceste will honor him by perusing a sonnet he has had the temerity to compose, will he, etc., etc.; and the rest is bows, compliments, and over-done politeness.

Alceste is in a mood, and he knows it, when he cannot give a just sentence on anything, least of all on a ribbon of poetry. He begs politely to be excused, but no excuse will serve. So he reads the thing, badly—for it is not worse than fairly mediocre—and tells more than the truth. He tells an exquisite author to his face that his poetry is hopeless. The thing is not according to the rules; even a vindictive critic does not pull a poet's nose except vicariously in print. He, the most sincere man in the world, with a reputation that attracted this hopeful genius, turns out to be almost a boor, hopelessly out of character now. And the young man, justly outraged, rushes off for his revenge. There is a law against such violations of the code of a gentleman.

Knowing that he is wrong, but unwilling to acknowledge it, as is natural—for when before had he been in such a meaningless tangle of execrable taste—off he rushes for comfort to Célimène, the girl he loves. Now let us not be too bitter in our judgment of this young woman. She is young, charming, as her admirers prove, witty, and clever. She seeks the gaiety and attention her nature craves. She loves Alceste, sincerely as far as she is capable, but she loves her irresponsible freedom more and the admiration of brilliant friends. She is clever also, else she never would have discovered the merit of Alceste. To her the troubled hero flies for comfort, and a word from her would have set things right again. But unfortunately, unfortunately, she is in one of her gayest moods, with coxcombs coming and going, and chatting the most brilliant nonsense, when in rushes this man like a thundercloud and calls her sharply to time for her levity. Again, the thing just isn't done, by a gentleman of rational penetration. You can't scold your fiancée in public, if she has any spirit, and hope for submission and affection.

"CÉLIMÈNE (to Alceste). What! not gone yet!

ALCESTE.

No, I intend to stay,

Although my visit should outlast the day.

This hour you choose between us.

CÉLIMÈNE.

Hush!

ALCESTE.

Speak out.

CÉLIMÈNE. You rave!

ALCESTE.

You shall no longer flout

My hopes with hollow pretexts. You shall speak.

CÉLIMÈNE. Ah!

ALCESTE.

You shall choose between us.

CÉLIMÈNE.

What mad freak . . .

ALCESTE. There's no escape. This dallying must end."

So the thing goes from bad to worse. He is summoned

on account of his wretched lack of taste in his dealings with the marquis; he is utterly wretched on account of his injured love for Célimène. The very presence of his best friends becomes to him a reproach, and off he rushes, renouncing love, friends, society, everything, a curdled spirit, at odds with the world—a misanthrope.

“But I, betrayed by all, o’erwhelmed and wronged,  
I leave a mad world where I scarce belonged  
To seek some spot in this unfriendly earth  
That honors liberty and manly worth.”

The *Misanthrope* is rightly the greatest social comedy ever written.

But it is not society that is being scourged and the honesty of Alceste being commended in this play—to read it so is to miss the whole of Molière’s fine sense of social values. It is Alceste who is wrong, just as it was Hamlet who was wrong—not in character but in his lack of ability to cope with a situation that though critical was one of the things a perfectly balanced spirit ought to be able to meet. Had Hamlet had a little more of the alert aggressiveness of Laertes, had Alceste had a bit more of the tolerance and patience of Philinte, the plays could never have been written. As Aristotle said, centuries ago, you can not have either a tragedy or a comedy if you have a perfect character. And it is precisely because the themes are so pitifully commonplace, and the results to human life so dismally obvious, that the plays required the highest genius to give them poetic convincingness. Tartuffe is grand in his wickedness, Alceste is weak. To make great comedy about him is like attempting to discover a theme for eloquent poetry in a cold in the head. But even this trifling affliction is the cause of as much human misery as many of our most dreaded plagues.

Racine, Molière's friend, was at work on the same theme of good manners; but dealing with the more devastating passions, he turned naturally to tragedy. He is far below the level of his companion, for his range is less admirable and his characters more uniform. He is also more nearly dated by the social background of his age. But a play like *Athalie* or *Britannicus* is a piece of literary statuary that one should be willing to go far to see. The latter is the high water mark of French tragic poetry, and as praise this goes far. The story is taken from the life of the Emperor Nero, and gives the turning point in his career, when he passes from attractive youth into cruel manhood. Racine is interested in these critical moments when some disturbing factor seems to rise from the unsuspected depths of what looks like a fine personality to drive the character to his passionate ruin.

The story is as simple as possible. Unlike Shakespeare, Racine does not interest himself in the gradual unfolding of the character as he reacts to the urge of experience on experience. It is here all concentrated into the one situation where rival forces meet in the mental conflict, character pitched in deadly battle against character, or the heart of the hero torn by colliding passions. Nero has been a charming youth raised most carefully by his mother Agrippina and his wise tutors Burrhus and Seneca. Now he is passing into manhood. Near him is his cousin Britannicus, a more sedate youth, a trifle younger. But there is a smouldering volcano in Nero, that only his mother has suspected; and the motive for the explosion comes quickly. He sees Junie, the betrothed of Britannicus, and falls in love. The scene where the shaken soldier Burrhus describes the sudden transformation of the attractive boy into the murderous monster is almost without rival in dramatic literature.

"Without a change of color Nero saw him die,  
 Already his unfailing eyes have learned the stare  
 Of the tyrant from infancy enured to crime."

In that one scene is foreshadowed all the horrors that this tyrant's reign is now burdened with. Nero, like Alceste, had a fatal flaw, unsuspected by his friends, the last thing one would expect to discover in the affectionate and artistic youth. But it was there, and when the shock came that could call it forth, devastating tragedy followed.

There is dramatic irony in these situations by Molière and Racine, the utter unexpectedness of the outcome, and yet its utter convincingness. The downfall of the character by the very quality that seemed to be his strength. Tartuffe fails only when he turns from hypocrisy to truth. Alceste is too fine for a coarse world, and his delicacy of sentiment proves his ruin. Nero though artistic is also temperamental, and gusts of passion that in a private person would go like summer thunderstorms are here cosmic catastrophes. These poets, too, like Shakespeare, had looked on life and seen its bitter ironies, where the impossible and the irrational suddenly by psychological necessity become convincing fact. The life of reason and tolerance and balance and social virtue that the ideal of the gentleman demands, is perfect in theory, but is for a perfect world. With individuals cast in faulty moulds their very virtues become at times their worst enemies.

But trusting in the power of his revelation, Molière uses comedy as a social weapon, if not to correct the vice, at least to call it into the open and give it an obvious name. Seeing the unsociability of the comic character, perhaps by laughter, the comic poet fancies, he can remedy the disease. I am reminded of this sentence from George Meredith's essay on the comic spirit:

"Whenever [men] wax out of proportion . . . whenever they offend sound reason and fair justice, are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually or in the bulk—the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit."

Molière too has the same idea of the efficacy of the comic rapier. First he must be careful to be accurate, in order to be convincing: "When you come to paint human beings it behooves you to follow nature: one wants these portraits to be convincing; and you have done nothing if in them you do not compel people to recognize the men and women of their time." Then the poet proceeds to the observation of social faults. "The affair of comedy is in general to represent all human faults, and especially those of the people of our own century."

Only when these accurate pictures have been convincingly drawn can the comic poet hope also to be the prophylactic reformer. But Molière at least took this part of his mission with becoming seriousness. He writes in his preface to *Tartuffe*, at the time when the play was attacked as a wholly unjustified and sacrilegious attack upon the Jesuit order:

"The very best strokes in a moral treatise are most frequently less potent than those of satire: and nothing chides more successfully the great mass of the people than the painting of their faults. There is no more magnificent attack on vice than to expose it to the laughter of the world. A person will bear reproach with fortitude, but he can never endure raillery. He may be willing to be vicious, but never to be ridiculous."

But Molière is not confined to his particular century, careful as he was to observe and make ridiculous its vices. Even the pompous marquises of his satire are as alive to-day, though they wear their ribbons and lace with a difference;

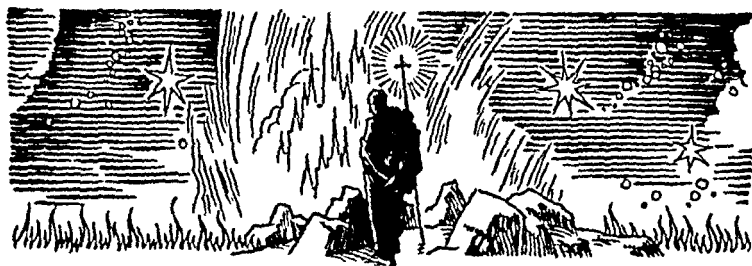
and his greater characters, his Harpagon, his Orgon, his Tartuffe, his Célimène, his Alceste, they are with us always, though their dialect may not be Parisian.

But Molière's laughter is at its best rarely gay. Great comedy is always thoughtful, and gaiety proceeds from an empty mind. Domestic tragedy as in *Tartuffe*—or near-tragedy—is not a thing that makes one hold his sides with laughter. Nor is the household of the *Femmes Savantes*, divided against itself and going to the devil for the sake of vain but precious learning, quite a thing whose ludicrous aspect strikes one as harmlessly funny. Poor Armande who has given up love for astronomy and grammar, and too late wakes to her loss, is not quite harmlessly diverting. The contrast between the ideal and the real; the gentleman Alceste brought to bay by stark fact, facing a world he will not try to understand, so confident is he in his ideal, such a thing brings a shudder. Even so ridiculous a farce as *Le Malade Imaginaire*, laughable as it is, is not, as a famous French critic has said, wholly a diversion. The poor imaginary invalid who needs sound sense, gets from his wife the caresses of a tiger and the tears of a crocodile. A world in which these things happen is not one to laugh at with thoughtless mirth. But of this pattern is Molière's thought always, if one pursue it below the surface.

It is interesting too, that in Molière there are no wholly admirable characters save those of untouched and still idealistic youth. Against the needs and aspirations of this yet unspoiled generation there is always the selfish spirit of hardened age. The perpetual conflict between youth and age—idealism and grasping realism—again I am paraphrasing Lemaître—often rises to such poignant intensity that we can scarce refuse our tears. Youth—not yet in revolt—but youth in bondage dreaming of the day when

revolt may be possible. Clean enthusiastic youth in chains to parents who refuse to see beyond their own immediate needs, and would barter their children as one exchanges furniture, the youthful wife and the heavy-eyed suspicious husband, the reasonable place of youth in a reasonable society—this all seems part of the revolt of the generation that Molière has in distant view. Molière a spirit in revolt? It is hardly just to use the word. Comedy is never in revolt, if anything comedy is best when it jealously guards the best in institutions of the past. The comic critic Aristophanes was no Jacobin, though he was an image breaker; but the images he broke were false images the new generation had set up as objects of worship. Shakespeare was not revolutionary, though in the *Tempest* and in *As You Like It* he is dreaming of other times and other things that so easily might be. Molière equally is not destructive except of the faults of the present, and is anxious to substitute the best ideals of the cultured gentleman. If reasonableness in personal conduct, tolerance, good manners, mutual respect, and a hatred of the false, can be made to prevail—good sense, "*le bon sens*", and nature, as Boileau put it—then there will be no more need, nor any theme, for the comic spirit, or the tragic. But this is conservatism, and the theme of all classic humanism.





## XIV. THE PURITAN CONSCIENCE

"Suffering for truth's sake  
Is fortitude to highest victory. . . .

Only add  
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,  
Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,  
By name to come call'd charity, the soul  
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A Paradise within thee, happier far."

*Paradise Lost.*

"The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They, hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way."

*Paradise Lost.*

THERE is something a trifle repellent to most in the word Puritan. Its implications are resented by those who love life and would look for joy and beauty in nature and man. Like a cold mist it seems to cling to the landscape, hiding its loveliness, and to chill the heart of all exposed to its busy penetration. It is associated with vinegar visages, with nasal accents, with righteous self-complacency, with a desire to make the world in its own image, with repressive blue laws, with a scornful contempt for the mildest worldly pleasures, with stern discipline, with windy sermons, with the ugliness of utter rectitude. To those whose ideas of the Puritan are borrowed from this common stock the answer of Comus to the indignant outburst of the Lady is conclusive:

"O foolishness of men! that lend their ears  
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,  
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,  
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence.  
Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth,  
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,  
Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,  
Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,  
But all to please, and sate the curious taste?"

But a movement in England and later in America that claimed for its adherents some of the best minds of the time, and the most generous, a thing that produced the poetry of a Spenser and the grandeur of a Milton, this is not a thing that can be dismissed or frozen into inactivity by a gesture of Comus' magic wand or of liberal indignation. Nor were the Puritans at their worst in either country quite the drab preachers of unattainable and undesirable austerity that they have been painted. The satire in Butler's *Hudibras* is exquisite, if the thing he described had ever had any real existence.

After the magic prelude of Queen Elizabeth there came evil days upon England, days that called for great resolution on the part of any who touched public life. It is a far cry from the enthusiastic *Faerie Queene* with its huge trust in the potent future of England to the narrow opportunism of the English Machiavelli, Lord Bacon. The one is a flaming prophet of the glories of the future, the other is a barrel of worldly wisdom for the prudent present. The one is a fairy knight winning immortality by courageous chivalry; the other is a model of finesse in political and moral chess. The one age gave the spectacle of a defeated Armada, of Drakes and Frobishers and Raleighs and Sidneys, and the other captains redoubtable in war and

gallantly leading captive the seven seas; the other the dismal spectacle of a Raleigh, now aged, brought like a common felon to the block. The one age gave Elizabeth, who, whatever her character, fired the imagination as the Faerie Queene; the other James I who lolled on the necks of unworthy favorites, squabbled with Parliament, and wrote a treatise against tobacco.

These were drab, uncertain days. To those who loved the new church, and its growing national tradition, there was the ever present and growing spectre of a revived Catholicism, slowly but surely strangling the Huguenots in France, recovering the lost states in Flanders, pushing inexorably into Germany. These were the days just before the terror of the Thirty Years War. At home there was the ever widening rift between Puritan and Anglican. To us in these days of a perfect accord between church and state as to respective powers, it is difficult to see how closely state policy and religious theory were then allied. Bacon gives a clue toward an understanding. The world hitherto had never before conceived it possible for two religious sects to divide a nation, and the nation yet to preserve its integrity. Religious unity was like family unity, a thing inherent; and the Reformation had merely given the prince the opportunity to select which brand of the faith—the new or the old—should be for the nation. The Puritan, longing for a larger break from Rome, held the Anglican to be guilty of a weak compromise. The Anglican looked upon the Puritan as threatening to set up a religious anarchy. Both were utterly sincere; and sincerity sometimes makes for the worst of family jars. Above all, the king, James, as later his son Charles, was, to say the least, in a difficult position, and unable quite to discover in himself the moral character to meet the test. When wisdom was needed

and a wary compromise, he talked about the royal prerogative. Elizabeth, had known more than a thing or two about royalty, but had always managed adroitly to save prerogative and manage Parliaments. But read this letter from James to his little son Charles:

"As it is atheism and blasphemy to dispute what God can do, so it is presumption and a high contempt in a subject to dispute what a king can do, or to say that a king cannot do this or that."

Few at this time objected to this doctrine of royal absolutism, even among the most violent Puritans. Calvin himself and Luther were quite explicit on the point. All they wanted was that the prince and his subjects should be Protestant. Here for example are Luther's words: "Insurrection is never justified, it never brings the amelioration desired." Calvin goes even farther: "Magistrates are ordained by God, authorized by him, and in everything represent his person, and act as his vicars." James Stuart was only quoting the best available authority; but people who resented the growing stubbornness of a king, resented having it called the will of God. It savored a little of blasphemy itself. And the distress of the Puritan was increased when he saw gradually that the Anglican became the chief supporter of the King's romantic posturings.

It was in this atmosphere of increasing apprehension that the young Milton grew up. It was when the tension broke and the Civil War began that he arrived at mature manhood. It was during the bewildering succession of constitutional experiments of Cromwell that he did brave service for what he thought right. It was in the days of reaction, after all that he had fought for seemed lost in a new and less worthy royal despotism, that to challenge his faith he wrote his *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

Milton's life like Milton's poetry is an apology for that most national and most worthy thing, the Puritan conscience. Without it the whole history of England and America would have had an entirely different texture. What Shakespeare saw as the irony of life, Milton strives to see as the working of something moral and compelling in the heart of man himself. Milton is above all the tradition of the new America.

The youthful Milton is a pure humanist, with an exquisite gift of song. He is interested in ideas, ideas that are beautiful, like those in the *Morning Song* where he tries to unite Christ and Apollo, the ideal of pagan beauty with the ideal of Christian love and sacrifice, but all without connection with reality. And so he goes through the exquisite *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, toying melodiously with the light that never was on land and sea, the pure poet's dream. Great poetry does not so vaporize itself in exquisite colors and perfumes. Even *Comus* is only an exercise in melody of the easy triumph of Virtue over the moral ugliness of Excess. To be sure the poet loves virtue, but he cannot utterly abhor its opposite, and some of the most exquisite poetry is put into the mouth of the heathen sorcerer. Apollo, though not admirable like the Christ, is yet lovely in his seductive appeal. But in *Lysidas* his powers seem suddenly to have matured. There is still the longing "to sport with Amaryllis in the shade". But even Apollo has become austere with the menace of the eyes of all-seeing Jove and the promise of fame in Heaven. Poetry is a serious, moral calling, and the poet turns to fresh fields and pastures new. He little guessed then, this precocious and lovely youth, who longed "by the help of heaven" for "immortality of fame", who had also a "passion for the good and fair", where these pastures new lay,

how far for awhile from poetry and poetic utterance. But they were to teach him much of the motives of life and to give him a moral philosophy. Humanism, beauty, ideas of perfection, cannot defeat the sinister forces of evil nakedly displayed, when the poet becomes conscious of their intellectual, moral, and religious tyranny. There are times to appeal to the sword. Very different is Milton from Montaigne who lived in much the same uncertain times. Milton is the combatant, throwing in his lot with the side he sees as God's. In the end we shall find that, though yet a fighter, he stands alone, a stark and yet undefeated champion of a moral order as yet unrealizable—almost a Dante.

For like Dante, Milton took his calling as poet with the feverish energy of the old Hebrew prophet. He that would write a great poem must be a great man, is what he says of himself in his *Second Defense of the English People*, before the great poem was more than begun. As a youth even, his industry was unflagging: "From my twelfth year I scarcely ever went to bed before midnight, which was the first cause of injury to my eyes." So he set himself apart, destined as he had been first for the ministry, for a larger calling, that of the nation's bard; of a nation in arms, as he liked to fancy it, "an old and haughty nation, proud in arms", against all injustice and moral error, a Red Cross knight, in a new Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, taken from the allegorical mists of the past, and sent on his quest amid the green fields and busy streets of bewildered England. The righteous had stripped for battle, his sword too would not be wanting. Dante would have loved Milton.

Like the prophetic bard he had prepared himself against the day his lips would be touched by the live coal taken by the angel from the altar of Truth. He had no doubts, ever, of his poetic and ethical infallibility—his conscience.

And when he spoke it was as though the god of righteousness had put a trumpet to his mouth. He had not begun as a Puritan—far from it—but he had always the inflexibility of a Puritan purpose. See his earliest Latin verses, how like Samson he had registered his vows:

*"Additur huic scelerisque vacans et casta juventus,  
Et rigidi mores, et sine labe manus."*

But the sense of a church and state, a king and ministry and bishops, devoted to a new tyranny that would bind men's consciences and their reason, drove him into the Puritan camp, where he thought he saw a craving for liberty.

His first office was as far from poetic as one might fancy—a few scattered sonnets alone testify to the twitchings of his muse, while he held it in bondage to what he regarded as a more worthy labor. First a schoolmaster, in order to busy his days, while his active mind looked about for the most available weapon. Then a torrent of pamphlets, each in vindication of what he regarded as the nearest way. Then when the Parliament needed a man with a ready pen to write their apology and defiance, the undefined position as Latin Secretary and general pamphleteer. It was he when the Parliament, newly met, began to discuss a censorship of books, who broke out in that magnificent address, for all time, in favor of an unmuzzled press.

"Great art lies to discern in what the law is to bid restraint and punishment, and in what things persuasion only is to work. . . . For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person, more than the restraint of ten vicious. . . . Look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of virtue; for the matter of them both is the same. Remove that, and ye remove them both alike."

This puts the issue where it belongs. It was he, after the horror of an executed king swept the country, and the

faint-hearted in terror fled the camp, who spoke with authority in his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, to rally the virtuous and valiant.

"They tell us, that the law of nature justifies any man to defend himself, even against the king in person: let them shew us then, why the same law may not justify much more a state or whole people, to do justice upon him, against whom each private man may lawfully defend himself; seeing all kind of justice done is a defense to good men, as well as a punishment to bad; and justice done upon a tyrant is no more but the necessary self-defense of a whole commonwealth."

And when the upholders of the dead Charles went abroad for talent to make the name of regicide a scandal to all nations, Milton drew from his quiver the *Defense* and the *Second Defense of the English People*.

"For it is of no little consequence, O citizens, by what principles you are governed, either in acquiring liberty or in retaining it when acquired. And unless that liberty which is of such a kind as arms can neither procure nor take away, which alone is the fruit of piety, of justice, of temperance, and unadulterated virtue, shall have taken deep root in your minds and hearts, there will not long be wanting one who will snatch from you by treachery what you have acquired by arms."

But this is not to talk about Milton's prose or his theories of Government, though both are worth a long discussion. He wrote as fine prose as had been in England, and for its superior we shall have to look far. To it, however, he gave the best years of his life and his eyesight—nearly twenty years of continuous polemic, engaged against the best minds of his time at home and abroad, and gaining an enviable name with the tolerant, but the bitter hatred of his enemies. And then when all was lost, or was on the point of being lost, and Charles the Second was already setting out for London, he wrote his last and perhaps in



places his most eloquent appeal, his *Readie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, it was his "last words of our expiring liberty".

"That a nation would be so valorous to win their liberty in the field, and when they have won it, not know how to use it, . . . but basely and besottedly to run their necks again into the yoke which they have broken, and prostrate all the fruits of their victory for nought at the feet of the vanquished, besides our loss of glory, and such an example as kings and tyrants never yet had the like to boast of, will be an ignominy if it befall us."

When the curtain fell on the last act, Milton was alone, the work of twenty years seemed undone. Comus had triumphed over Virtue, and there was none to come to the rescue. So he turned to his *Paradise Lost*. The theme was appropriate, it was the story of man's original loss of liberty.

What does Milton mean by liberty? He seeks it for the press, he searches for it in the domestic relationship when he writes pamphlets on divorce, he seeks it in the state, he would overthrow bishops and an established clergy to discover it in religion. What is liberty? It was the question that had distressed Socrates in the *Republic*, it gave the only solace to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Dante goes to Heaven with Beatrice in its search, Montaigne discovers it in his *cabinet de travail* and his library. Each has brought some peculiar recipe, and though they all seem to have much in common, each has also much that is original. What is the Puritan brand? How are Puritanism and a love of liberty—this paradox—compatible?

The Biblical narrative meant more in those days, three hundred years ago, before science and modern criticism had banished Pan and wonder from the world—and faith. To most there was in it a mystery, a subtle meaning, which if

grasped would be of enormous significance to humanity. So Dante had worked with it; and so Milton approached it: "to justify the ways of God to man", to explain the mystery of human life and its end. The prose of to-day has lost this sense of vital mystery, but such a thought would have horrified the less downright minds in those dark days before science. To them man's reason and higher faculties were a mystery no natural phenomenon can explain. Man's instincts had elements paradoxically divine and diabolical, and his end something of far wider significance than six feet in some graveyard. He was the glory of creation, infinitely above and superior to all the other animals, made in God's image, and the heir to some destiny only Revelation could explain. For him the earth was transformed by the return of the seasons, for him the stars revolved on their nightly courses, for him God somewhere in his divine purpose set aside a place just a little lower than the angels. The seventeenth century took this thought—except for a daring thinker or two—as naturally as an infant turns to its mother's breast. Even the Greek and the Roman mind was never shaken in its faith in human perfectability and a supreme purpose in human destiny.

Not that all minds, or even any of the more serious thinkers, took the Biblical narrative as a literal transcript of fact, or the story of creation as divine journalistic enterprise. Dante, as we have seen, treats it as an allegory of human nature in its transformation. So does Milton, but in a different manner. It was told thus simply in the book of *Genesis* that all might thereby receive edification. For the simple it was a plain story of the Glory of the Almighty, of the great dignity of man, and of his human weakness, facts that were patent to all. To others it became a mystic symbol of man's fate, and the fatal apple of man's original

weakness, as against the transcendent power of the Creator and his far-reaching, supernal plans. To make these philosophically sound, and humanly significant, was the ideal of clergyman, scholar, and poet. And it is surprising now as we turn the pages of forgotten books, how many and various were the efforts to pierce the veil of the divine purpose. The seventeenth century was often theologically minded, for only thus could it show an interest in humanity. The Puritan was no different from the others, even the highest of Cavalier poets will not be able to refrain from a return to the theme.

So Milton, when in the hour of defeat he contemplated the ruin of all his high hopes for a perfect state on earth and in England, when he saw all the high promise of the Revolution fade under the inept hands of well-meaning but obtuse human agents, turned again to the scriptures and to his philosophy, trying again to read the mystery of man's incorrigible stupidity and blind pride, and to discover again some justification of the "ways of God to man", or failing that of "man's ways to God". For Milton, though he stood alone, in those dark days, never lost his faith in human nature—did he not have the spectacle of at least one just man to comfort his faith?

The *Paradise Lost*, though it has the length of an epic, and is one of the world's greatest poems, in plot has all the compactness of a Greek tragedy, with a double plot, each story throwing light on the other. The fall of the angels, the fall of man:—or to put it more bluntly than Milton did in the poem, the Almighty had created an imperfect universe, even Heaven itself had disclosed a flaw, and His experiment with earth was, to an unenlightened eye, an even more tragic failure. Nearly half the angels, and all humanity, had raised a heel against the divine plan.

It was as though a potter had made an exquisite vase, and at the last moment shattered one side, or a sculptor an incomplete statue, but enough to show the cunning of the artist, as also his inadequacy. Was God inadequate, or is the result, in spite of the apparent discrepancy, a more laudable work of art? This is the Puritan Milton's problem. Most authors who had grappled with the theme had rested assured in the perfection of the Almighty; this seemed an axiom, to dispute it was sacrilege. Man's difficulties are part of a divine plan. Hence they were much put to it to explain why a perfect God can create an imperfect universe. Goethe will have an interesting answer later, bound up with some new ideas of science. Montaigne wisely ignores God, and accepts human frailty with a tightening of his belt. But Milton will discover glory in the thought that God is imperfect, for it lends an added lustre to man and an added responsibility. For the clue to the problem of evil in the universe as a whole, as in the heart of man, to this poet who has been called austere and grim—perhaps he is at times—is discovered in the meaning of moral freedom. In spite of himself, or because of himself, the Almighty created a world, not of absolute law and order, but only of relative; for there is always the full opportunity for caprice, for the irregular, the lawless, the immoral, the irrational—these words to the poet are quite synonymous. The modern scientist ought not to find too much to criticise in the Puritan poet.

The story of *Paradise Lost* ought to be familiar to all. Milton got the plot from the Bible and from legends that had sprung up enlarging upon hints there given. It has three parts—the great rebellion in heaven, the creation of the world, the creation and fall of man. Why, it has been often asked, did Milton, living at a time when the new

astronomy was known to scholars, and who himself had visited the old Galileo, employ the outworn system of Dante? Perhaps, for one thing, for the very reason that Dante had used it. It had high poetic sanction. But more than this, to have a stage for his cosmic drama, he must have an order of things that has clearly bounded limits. Heaven must be *somewhere*, likewise Hell; and an Earth that is to be the center of the stage for a cosmic tragedy must not be a forgotten atom of dust in the depths of space. The game must be worth the anxiety of the great combatants. So his Heaven is a region, somewhere—the modern astronomy would be unable to find it, but the old could; Hell is a nine days cosmic flight from Heaven; and pendant on a golden chain from Heaven hangs the universe of stars, planets and its central jewel, the Earth.

No hint is offered of the creation of the timeless and spaceless region of Heaven. But not long after the creation of the angels, the Deity proposed to set up the Son as an executive Viceroy. The immediate response to this manifesto was the rebellion of Satan and his followers—a magnificent gesture of pride—the kind of thing that human history abundantly illustrates. The magnificence of the loyalty of a third of Heaven, under the banner of the Rebel leader:

"He spake: and, to confirm his words, out-flew  
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs  
Of mighty cherubim; the sudden blaze  
Far round illumin'd Hell: highly they rag'd  
Against the Highest; and fierce with grasped arms  
Clash'd on their sounding shields the din of war,  
Hurling defiance toward the vault of Heav'n."

The war that ensued was terrible, and sometimes farcical. Angelic beings might not be slain, but they could do a

great deal of damage, until it looked as though Heaven itself might be ruined for the caprice of a Deity and the answering caprice of a potent vassal. But on the last day the Messiah assumed the dreaded celestial arms:

"Yet half his strength he put not forth, but check'd  
His thunder in mid volley, for he meant  
Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n:  
The overthrown he rais'd, and as a herd  
Of goats or timorous flock together throng'd,  
Drove them before him thunder-struck, pursu'd  
With terrors and with furies to the bounds  
And crystal wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,  
Roll'd inward, and a spacious gap disclos'd  
Into the wasteful Deep; the monstrous sight  
Struck them with horror backward, but far worse  
Urg'd them behind; headlong themselves they threw  
Down from the verge of Heav'n; eternal wrath  
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit."

Hell, newly created, yawned for the routed angels—now devils. And it is here, when they are lying stunned "rolling in the fiery gulf", that the poem opens at the very crisis of the narrative. It is here in Book I that we have Milton's finest poetry, when he describes the infernal pride and glory of Satan.

"What though the field be lost  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome;  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me."

Now the Almighty, to repair the gap that had been left in his kingdom by the rebellion, creates the earth, and in the new Paradise, the garden of Eden, places man, whose

children shall be the new jewels in the celestial crown. The story of the creation is as fine, in its superb poetry, as anything in any literature, the labor of the six days.

"Heav'n op'nd wide  
 Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound  
 On golden hinges moving, to let forth  
 The King of Glory in his powerful Word  
 And Spirit coming to create new worlds.  
 On Heav'nly ground they stood, and from the shore  
 They view'd the vast immeasurable abyss  
 Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,  
 Up from the bottom turn'd by furious winds  
 And surging waves, as mountains to assault  
 Heav'ns highth, and with the centre mix the pole.  
     'Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou  
         Deep, peace!'  
 Said then th' omnific Word, 'your discord end.' "

But now evil, or unreason, or passion, which before had been only latent, is active and very intelligent, Satan. He will not suffer the work of God to prosper, not so long as Hell endures and he is its sovereign. There he reigns an equal in will and pride at least, and he will employ such means as he possesses to ruin the plans of him "whom thunder has made greater". The rumor of this new creation has gone abroad, Satan has heard of it, and ventures in an amazing feat of self-sacrifice—that is to parallel the later self-sacrifice of the Messiah to save man—to cross the ancient realm of Chaos and old Night. He succeeds, reaches the Garden of Eden. He is struck into remorse at the scene he beholds and contrasts with Hell.

"Now conscience wakes despair  
 That slumber'd, wakes the bitter memory  
 Of what he was, what is, and what must be  
 Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue."

But at the sight of the beauty of Eve, God's last act of creation, woman, all his diabolical nature for one moment leaves him. Like an amazed school boy, this arch rebel stands "stupidly good".

"Her Heav'nly form  
Angelic, but more soft, and feminine,  
Her graceful innocence, her every air  
Of gesture or least action over-aw'd  
His malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd  
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:  
That space the Evil One abstracted stood  
From his own evil, and for the time remain'd  
Stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd,  
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge."

But the story proceeds to the temptation of this woman, whom his diabolical instinct discovers to be the weaker vessel. He begins as a modern Don Juan, though his form is that of a courtly snake. The woman falls. Adam is horrified at her rebellion, but, not willing to leave her even though he condemns her act, becomes a partner in her misdeeds. One should make a gesture of approval here at the magnanimity of the austere Puritan poet. He will share death and damnation with his love rather than dwell alone in celestial bliss. It is almost Paolo and Francesca. But all nature felt the wound when, for a second time, the divine plan went astray, and Evil had the victory.

"So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck'd, she ate:  
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,  
That all was lost."

Finally the poem closes with a revelation to man first of the future, the terrible woes his fall has brought unwittingly



upon all his issue—the plagues, the wars, the innumerable disasters that man's unreason shall bring in its train, until Adam is ready to deny the life that must now be purchased by death.

“O miserable mankind, to what fall  
 Degraded, to what wretched state reserv'd?  
 Better end here unborn. Why is life giv'n  
 To be thus wrested from us? rather why  
 Obtruded on us thus? who if we knew  
 What we receive, would either not accept  
 Life offer'd, or soon beg to lay it down,  
 Glad to be so dismiss'd in peace. Can thus  
 Th' image of God in Man created once  
 So goodly and erect, though faulty since,  
 To such unsightly sufferings be debas't  
 Under inhuman pains?”

But after this revelation of evil comes the promise of the Messiah, the story of the redemption and the means of grace, that a pitying Deity shall hold out to a weak and inherently corrupt humanity. Good shall be victorious over evil, somewhere, sometime, captivity shall be led captive, right not wrong shall triumph, but this victory must be with man's aid. Man is man, the morally responsible, the reasonable caught in the meshes of unreason. The battle with unreason is a human battle, with divine aid, and the triumph, when and where it comes, will be a human triumph. Strengthened by this new thought Adam wakes Eve. Her heart is all with him.

“But now lead on,  
 In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
 Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
 Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
 Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou,  
 Who for my wilful crime are banisht hence.”

And silently the two make their way into the world now of stark reality, mingled reason and unreason.

"They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Wav'd over by that flaming brand; the gate  
With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms:  
Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wip'd them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way."

The poem begins with high tragedy—the blaze of defiance of Satan in Hell, cosmic evil defeated for a moment, but breathing vengeance and potent for the future. It ends on "humanity's sad state", man driven from ideal bliss to the actual terror of life, yet confident also in his human prerogative. From tragedy to pathos, with all the emotions between that the allegory of human life affords.

Of course the story is allegorical, and the figures are allegorical. In the hands of a lesser poet the whole would have been stupid, compared with the utter simplicity of the Biblical narrative, which at best is not much more than a folk-tale and has its counterpart in other Semitic legends. But Milton has lent the whole a grandeur, a significance, yes, even a high realism, that is not discoverable anywhere in all poetry that plays with the story of the scriptures. He has done with *Genesis* precisely what the Greek dramatists did with the simple and meaningless traditions of Oedipus or Antigone, made the narrative full of significance for human destiny. To be sure at times God seems to talk like James I, and Adam is hopeless middle age striving to atone for the intellectual weakness of a young and beautiful wife. But Satan and Eve, each in its kind is the finest thing that

poetry has produced. Satan the rebel, the symbol of the powers of evil, and yet not lost to all goodness. Eve the fair, the feminine, the symbol of art and beauty, as also of human frailty. And between them Adam, torn by the double impulse, love of beauty, hatred of evil, the battle ground of reason and unreason. Of such texture shall we find is the thought of this poem.

*Paradist Lost* is the allegory of human freedom; it is more, it is the confident challenge, in a day when there were creeds proclaiming the subtle meaning of regeneration and unregeneration, and the futility of the human will, as is now done in the name of some science—it is the confident challenge that human nature rises to dignity only because it is free. It is a freedom that even God may not challenge:

“Ingrate, he had of me  
All he could have; I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
Such I created all th’ ethereal powers  
And spirits, both them who stood and them who fail’d;  
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.”

For the dignity of creation would be impaired, were freedom denied.

“Not free, what proof could they have giv’n sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,  
Where only what they needs must do, appear’d,  
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?”

Good and evil and all moral qualities disappear in a universe where all is perfect. There can be no admiration for what has cost no pains; how shall man save his soul if to do so he does not have to risk the loss of all the world?

But freedom is not caprice or anarchy or absence of obedience to higher authority, for Satan himself, the arch-rebel in his most impassioned moment says to his followers:

"For orders and degrees  
Jar not with liberty, but well consist."

No one may disobey a just law and yet be quite free. Freedom is not anarchy or absence of restraint. And to the Angel prating of servitude, because now he is threatened with the domination of the newly chosen Messiah, Abdiel the Just, the "servant of God", replied:

"Apostate, still thou err'st; nor end wilt find  
Of erring, from the path of truth remote:  
Unjustly thou depriv'st it with the name  
Of servitude to serve whom God ordains,  
Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same,  
When he who rules is worthiest, and excels  
Them whom he governs. This is servitude,  
To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebell'd  
Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,  
Thyself not free, but to thyself enthrall'd."

And thus the devil, paradoxically, in search for a larger freedom, found only a larger bondage, and for his deluded followers, the most hideous of tyrannies, shown in allegory by the fiery and frozen continent of Hell.

For Satan's fall loosed him from the government of reason which is true liberty, and this alone is the law of God: "What obeys reason is free, and reason he made right." And in its place set up the anarchy of caprice, of pride, of the clamoring appetites, such as are pictured also by Dante in his Hell and Purgatory. Such also is now the remorseful state of man, now that man has chosen the route of unreason.

"Yet know withal,  
 Since thy original lapse, true Liberty  
 Is lost, which always with right Reason dwells  
 Twinn'd, and from her hath no dividual being:  
 Reason in Man obscur'd, or not obey'd,  
 Immediately inordinate desires  
 And upstart passions catch the government  
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce  
 Man, till then free. Therefore, since he permits  
 Within himself unworthy powers to reign  
 Over free reason, God in judgment just  
 Subjects him from without to violent lords;  
 Who oft as undeservedly inthrall  
 His outward freedom. Tyranny must be,  
 Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse."

The original state of man, the "state of nature", as Milton more than once calls it, is the perfect balance of faculties that Plato describes in the *Republic*, with reason in control, so that, like unruly horses, the charioteer can keep them to their appropriate tasks. Only while Plato looked forward by the means of education to secure this happy state, the Christian poet thinking of the perfect plan of a divine Creator, puts this blessed vision of human perfection in the remote past. The "state of nature" once lost must now be regained and at the cost of a divided labor, the grace of God, in the sacrifice of the Messiah, seen sometimes almost allegorically by Milton, and the serious effort at moral regeneration by man. Hence there must be laws, but laws drawn with extreme care, to express in outward form this reason, so greatly desired for the human race. All laws are imperfect, as humanity is imperfect, but they are a gesture of perfection; and in time, when reason prevails, will be discovered again to be unnecessary. How like this is to Dante.

"So law appears imperfect, and but giv'n  
With purpose to resign them in full time  
Up to a better cov'nant, disciplin'd  
From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,  
From imposition of strict laws, to free  
Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear  
To filial, works of law to works of faith."

So also is temperance necessary, for it is the necessary ethical discipline which appetite must have—severe at times—in order that reason and the will of God may prevail. This is the theme of *Comus*, but in the mature *Paradise Lost* the poet discovers for it a philosophic motive. If the later and more degenerate forms of Puritanism look to law for its own sake and have a larger trust in its efficiency than had its great poet, and if temperance at times seems to savor of something that ought to be described by its antonym, the fault ought not wholly to be charged against this warrior poet, whose grimness is only too often the armor he must wear in a day of battle.

Thus Milton identifies ethics and theology, and makes of both a weapon for the ceaseless war against unreason and the evil of the Devil. Never is Milton more in the old classical tradition, and a friend of Socrates, than when he defines ethics, not as the will of God, like the Hebrew, but the inner need of a diseased soul, the only natural therapeutic if the human nature is to regain its humanity. Never is he more in the Christian tradition than when he sees that in this warfare man may not fight the battle alone, but needs the grace and aid of a more powerful spirit, the guiding reason of the universe. And Milton's faith does not need the pleasing and easy belief that the universe and its Creator are transcendent and beyond the need of human endeavor. In this eternal warfare against the imperfect,

the enemy of reason, man himself is in the first line of trenches as the shock troops of Deity. Not even Dante has attached quite the same dignity to the office of humanity.

Montaigne had thought of the life of reason as man's only life-preserver in a wasteful ocean of unreason, and of his life as at best solitary like that of the survivor of a cosmic wreck. Milton is equally aristocratic; his rational man is as rare as Montaigne himself, but he has a passion for the regeneration of the human race, perhaps a Puritanical passion, and he loves the noise of battle. He differs too from the aristocratic gentleman of the Court of Louis XIV, the *honnête homme, qui ne se pique de rien*, who will not allow his peace of mind to be disturbed by anything. Milton's reason is belligerent, is always disturbed by the sense of the world's imperfection, which is a blot in the great taskmaster's eye. Patience he never taught himself. Least of all was it for him also to serve with those "who only stand and wait". Is this a Puritan trait? If so it is not quite so unworthy as to be unlovingly caricatured by successors who can only be restless, never reasonable.

It was this same ideal of the Christian soldier that influenced Milton's ideas on art and woman. Long before the Pre-Raphaelites, back in the days of Dante, these two terms came almost to be synonymous, the beauty of woman, the longing to compass beauty in art. From his early master, Spenser, Milton too had learned to think of both in the same breath. But his experience with the one was unhappily not all that might have been desired; perhaps the true poet of woman should have least commerce with her in the flesh; perhaps Milton the austere was the last person in the world who could learn to accommodate his ways to those of a life-companion; perhaps he was only unlucky

when on that vacation day he went to a neighboring town on his father's business and came back with Mary Powell on his arm. Whatever the cause, Milton is the one great poet of all literature who has done injustice to the cause of woman, and at the same time has drawn for us the most exquisite picture of her fascination. There is nothing quite so satisfying as Milton's Eve in existence; and Milton has done more to make her daughters perennially unhappy than any other great and admirable man—except Saint Paul.

In her presence the poet trembles as did Adam when Eve was first led into his presence:

"Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her eye,  
In every gesture dignity and love."

For pure romantic passion, who has done better than this, and yet it is middle-aged Adam speaking, and to an all-knowing angel?

"Yet when I approach  
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems  
And in herself complete, so well to know  
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,  
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;  
All higher knowledge in her presence falls  
Degraded; Wisdom in discourse with her  
Loses discount'nanc't, and like Folly shows;  
Authority and Reason on her wait,  
As one intended first, not after made  
Occasionally; and to consummate all,  
Greatness of mind and Nobleness their seat  
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe  
About her, as a guard angelic plac't."

To be sure he instantly qualifies himself, knowing his own superior powers:



"For well I understand in the prime end  
Of Nature her the inferior."

And the angel gravely chides him for his impetuous eloquence:

"For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so?  
An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well  
Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,  
Not thy subjection. weigh with her thyself;  
Then value: oft-times nothing profits more  
Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right,  
Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou know'st,  
The more she will acknowledge thee her head,  
And to realities yield all her shows."

Poor woman, Eve, and her daughters. They are the lesser vessels, not like man made in God's likeness, but for man's comfort and treasure, to be prized above all worldly possessions but not worshipped. Where is Beatrice gone, and where Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche*? She is as exquisite as she is beautiful, and as charming as exquisite. See her song to Adam—he sings none to her, but only to God and the angel.

"Sweet is the breath of Morn, her rising sweet,  
With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the Sun  
When first on this delightful land he spreads  
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flow'r,  
Glistring with dew; fragrant the fertile earth  
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on  
Of grateful evening mild, then silent Night  
With this her solemn bird and this fair moon.  
And these the gems of Heav'n, her starry train:  
But neither breath of Morn when she ascends  
With charm of earliest birds, nor rising sun  
On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flow'r,  
Glistring with dew, nor fragrance after showers,

Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent Night  
With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon  
Or glittering star-light without thee is sweet."

To this hymn Adam adds the morning sermon and a lesson in astronomy. Splendid—Milton had been a school teacher and knew the needs of immature minds. Poor Mary Powell!

Yes, woman is the less worthy vessel. When Adam was created he hymned in praise to the Almighty, but Eve's first act was to look into a mirror.

"As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
A shape within the watry gleam appear'd  
Bending to look on me, I started back,  
It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,  
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixt  
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,  
Had not a voice thus warn'd me."

The mournful truth is that the soldier Milton, needing weapons for the fight, sees in woman the large power of emotional disturbance, and a turning one's back on the field of battle. It was right, to his mind, that only Eve<sup>1</sup> was approachable to the tempter. It was right that her emotional nature, less under the power of the austere reason, should succumb to the temptation and assume control, and after try to discover a false reason for the transgression. There is always a touch of Delilah in her charm. It was right that man, by his exceeding love for the fairest of creation, should love woman rather than eternal reason, and instructed by her, become partner of her guilty passion.

"However, I with thee have fixt my lot,  
Certain to undergo like doom; if death  
Consort with thee, death is to me as life;

So forcible within my heart I feel  
 The bond of Nature draw me to my own,  
 My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;  
 Our state cannot be sever'd; we are one,  
 One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself."

At least Adam was a gentleman, if one judges by some well-known standards. But Milton will not quite allow these more generous gestures. Earthly love is not always, perhaps not even often, an allegory of divine love, and the chosen mistress the power that draws men's souls upward. Puritanism is not chivalry without discrimination—a great deal of discrimination.

The truth is that like and unlike Adam, Milton trembled in the presence of beauty as symbolized by woman, but trembled like a guilty thing surprised. He loved it passionately, as did his master Spenser; but he feared it austere as a thing that diverted from reason and ministered to, if not advised, the appetite of unreason. Woman becomes the symbol of rebellion, as does art, of the pride of the flesh, against the armor of spirit. See the allegory of sin first in heaven, the creature of Satan and then his lovely paramour. But of this union was born the hideousness of Death. It is Sin here speaking to Satan—

"Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,  
 Then shining heav'nly fair, a goddess arm'd,  
 Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seiz'd  
 All the host of Heav'n; back they recoil'd afraid  
 At first, and call'd me SIN: and for a sign  
 Portentous held me; but familiar grown,  
 I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won  
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft  
 Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing  
 Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st  
 With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd  
 A growing burden."

But when seen in her natural shape this sin, this pride, appetite, appears most foul, and its whelp an ineffable monster.

"The one seem'd woman to the waist, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a serpent arm'd  
With mortal sting: about her middle round  
A cry of Hell-hounds never ceasing bark'd  
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
A hideous peal: yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturb'd their noise, into her womb,  
And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd,  
Within unseen."

To keep art and woman and beauty from becoming thus a moral curse is the poet's admonition to himself and perhaps also the unconscious reason for Adam's sermon to Eve in Paradise. The poet is as the Stoic philosopher here. She is the pearl that may be picked up by the seashore on the pilgrimage of life, but not to be too much prized lest man's ears be not alert to the pilot's call. All this—when Milton by nature and poetry and art was fitted to be greater than his master Spenser in his adoration of beauty. But one loss is compensated by a gain in intense moral seriousness, touched by a beauty, and yet a human beauty, of a kind the world had never known. He became thereby the greater poet.

Out of this eternal paradox of man—his reason in a Laocoön struggle with unreason—emerges that greatest of human achievements, moral character. There are those, not a few, who have found fault with Milton's picture of Deity—God is an eleemosynary institution, the Messiah is a pale white light in comparison with the fiery radiance of the fallen Satan. And rightly, perfection of this kind,

such aloofness from the human state of painful struggle, gives edification but no character. Dante was wiser when he made his Deity of unapproachable power and light, and gave it no utterance. Milton's Devil has character, admirable in his pride and winning sympathy by his tragic suffering. Eve gains character as the significance of her act and her self-sacrificing love for her husband are born in her once innocent mind. Adam too, so complaisantly perfect as the poem opens, becomes a strong figure, as the paradox of the human race becomes real in his own experience. Character is the moral gain for moral struggle, whatever its end. And even personified Evil itself cannot wholly divorce itself from good and renounce character, else Satan would become as palely symbolical as the figures of Sin and Death. Like the great figures in Shakespeare's tragedies, gradually unfolding in their splendor through the very intensity of their suffering, such are also the figures in Milton. Only Milton has given the process a moral formula and a philosophy.

This is Milton's justification of humanity to God; as God's lieutenant in a world of uncompleted design, he wins that wholly admirable thing, character, through conflict. And God's enemy, Satan, as his character becomes degraded through the triumph of unreason, tends to lose the quality of admiration. Satan, as he becomes more and more involved in the trickery of revenge, more and more becomes hateful and pale.

Milton's characters have just been compared with those in Shakespeare's tragedies. This in spite of the often repeated statement that the Christian doctrine excludes tragedy from the world; and this large exclusion has by a late writer been made to cover also Milton. The Christian doctrine certainly in its original form describes man's life

as a pattern of good and evil, which must be praised or reprehended in proportion as it meets the eye of the eternal judge. But this attitude toward life would have led Dante through Hell with face averted from the wicked, who by their torment glorify God's justice, and would have ruined the best portions of the *Inferno*. Paolo and Francesca are to Dante magnificent in their sin, and love is its own wicked justification. Farinata is superb in his defiance of the eternal Judge. To Dante, the most Christian of poets, evil has about it something that by its very mixture with the good, lends radiance to character. Pride is essentially good, and though displayed inappropriately here, is by contrast with the evil, the more superb. Love is essentially good though by a defiance of the laws that make society, it brought to the lovers of Rimini only eternal suffering. Such figures rise above their suffering and even indignities and proclaim also their eternal worth. They are tragic, and as such weighed in a balance very different from that of judges of righteousness only.

Judged by such standards Milton's Satan is one of the finest figures of pure tragedy the poet's mind has ever conceived—or the finest. The only other figure in literature one can place beside him is Aeschylus' Prometheus; but the Titan in his suffering has no such cosmic rôle as Milton's artificer of fraud and father of lies. These are hard names to call him, but the poet uses also worse, and yet can never lessen our admiration of his magnificent gesture of freedom:

“Fall’n cherub, to be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,  
To do aught good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
As being the contrary to his high will  
Whom we resist.”

Fancy the paradox. The abyss of degradation and pain and a burst of ringing triumph in his challenge.

"Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

His magnificent refusal to admit a cause lost, and his eternal vow to ceaseless revenge—this thing is cosmic. It is the old battler, Milton himself, who loved a good fighter:

"Peace is despair'd,  
For who can think submission? War then, war  
Open or understood must be resolv'd."

Nor are the softer qualities wanting that give grace even to the infernal serpent. See him in his moment of faltering strength, after his perilous way through the abyss of Chaos; he is alone in a new universe, but above he sees the familiar ramparts of Heaven, once his, now lost.

"Ay me, they little know  
How dearly I abide that boast so vain,  
Under what torments inwardly I groan;  
While they adore me on the throne of Hell,  
With diadem and sceptre high advanc'd  
The lower still I fall, only supreme  
In misery; such joy ambition finds."

See him again on his second meeting with Gabriel, once in battle on the plains of Heaven, now alone in the earthly Paradise, and Gabriel surrounded by his cohorts. There is not a sign of faltering as he confronts his once victorious antagonist. Satan is the romantic law-breaker, Gabriel only a celestial policeman.

"On th' other side Satan alarm'd  
Collecting all his might dilated stood,  
Like Teneriff or Atlas unremov'd:

His stature reach'd the sky, and on his crest  
Sat Horror plum'd; nor wanted in his grasp  
What seem'd both spear and shield."

These things win our sympathy; they are meant to, for Satan is a tragic figure; wicked, cosmically wicked, but like Dante's figures in Hell, winning sympathy for his excellence of character and his suffering that compensates even for the wickedness. If we use the old Aristotelian test of pity and terror as the accompaniments of true tragedy, and a better definition has as yet never been discovered, Milton's poem, like Aeschylus', is truly tragic. In it the poet of lost causes, almost makes Satan a cosmic hero. As with Shakespeare's Macbeth we acquiesce in the moral judgment pronounced against him, but we would go also a long way to commend the admirable qualities of the sinner. He paid and paid heavily for his guilt.

Milton is the great solitary. Though in his later years it is said he loved companionship and in his collegiate youth had the grace of countenance and action that led him to be called the Lady of Christ's, his best work is his solitary musings. Montaigne, though he lived in his *cabinet de travail*, lived much in companionship, in the ideas at least, of men. He knew them and the wards and springs of their actions. Shakespeare lived in a man's world likewise, and though his opportunities may have been few, he made the most of them and gained such knowledge of human nature as the world has never known. But Milton knew only himself, with others he was the idealist, with himself the most utter of realists. Into the *Paradise Lost* he has written much of his own passionate hopes and fears and much of his own character. But before he died he took one other Biblical legend, a folk-tale of Palestine of a folk hero, the

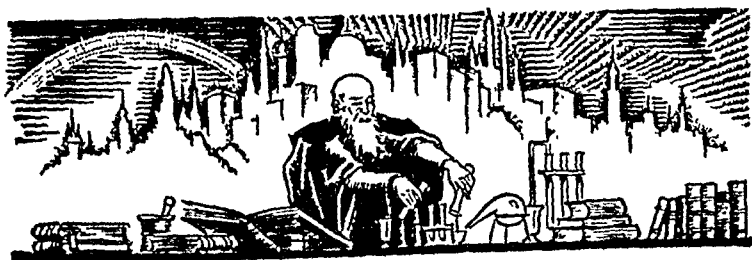


great Samson, and made of him also the allegory of the Puritan, defeated by evil, but still unsubdued.

Like the Puritan, the hero had had his day of glory and then in a moment of passionate weakness, had thrown all away at the entreaties of Delilah. The Presbyterian party had done the same thing with the insidious promises of the returning Royalists. And now the hero is chained, shorn of his strength, at the mercy of those whose mercy is the ignominy of laughter. These were the days when the Butlers were writing *Hudibrases* and the comic stage making a sport of all austere morals. Samson became the sport of Vanity Fair and ground corn for the Philistines, blind like the poet. Here too is tragedy, but also a promise and a threat. For the suffering which evil brought in its train brought also character to the hero: and from a light-minded but hard-fisted fighter, Samson is now an anointed champion, not yet known even to himself, but kept against the day of wrath. For degradation, and self-examination, and repentance bring to the blinded hero new strength and a new earnestness. He sees at last the eternal quality of the conflict—from a personal quarrel it has now become the old perennial battle between light and darkness, freedom and servitude.

And Samson dies, a martyr to the cause of freedom, but gloriously vindicating by the death of his enemies the righteousness of his cause. Milton's liberalism, too, the cry for a more generous tolerance, received its victory not many years later, though the poet did not live to see it. Nor did he live to know that with the new century and its freer tradition of the rights of man, his poem likewise would come to be judged fittingly. For in spite of the excesses of lesser men who tried and try to speak in its name, Puritanism, as Milton conceived it, the rule of reason, and

the insistence on the moral dignity of man, and the frank conviction that this life is a battle between reason and unreason, is the inspiration of that generous tradition to which in more recent years has been given the name Liberal. And Milton might well be called the first great English Liberal. It was his spirit too that has entered more deeply than that of any other, into the tradition of this our America.



## XV. ROMANCE AND SCIENCE

### I. THE ROMANTIC PROTEST

"A spirit lost in this immensity. I did not think, or reason, or philosophize, but with a kind of voluptuous delight I felt myself overwhelmed with the weight of the universe."

ROUSSEAU.

"What vagaries, sense confounding!  
Naught of measure to be hoped for!  
Like the blare of trumpet sounding,  
Over vale and forest ringing.  
What a riot! What a cry!"

THE lines are from Goethe's *Faust*, Part II. Faust and Helena, the symbols, as Goethe fancied them, of the spirit of the romantic north and of orderly and creative Greece, are together contemplating the new spirit that their union has suddenly evoked. It is Goethe's description of the seemingly sudden burst of passionate energy that flamed up in his youth, and that was yet in his old age burning fiercely in all Europe. It was a passionate period—this upheaval of all stock ideas, that began with Rousseau, swept the world into the crisis of the French Revolution, loosed the tongue of inarticulate Germany until the chorus of mighty singers was deafening, and gave a new literature, a new art, and a new social creed to half the world. Looking back, as usual one can examine the causes, and point out logically why the miracle was no miracle at all, just as the biologist can

tell you why some amphibians began to grow feathers to become birds. But the process must have been not a little bewildering to the people of the time; and good staid believers in the excellence of the past shook their heads and muttered warnings to "flaming youth" and its imitators.

But long before Goethe and even Rousseau there was an almost universal feeling that in the general run of life, as the eighteenth century philosophy saw life, there was something vital left out, something that people somehow found very difficult to give up, some adventure which their orderly lives had left off the program. For the eighteenth century went triumphantly forward with the ideas of reason, common sense, and science, until it had built itself a mansion of thought that still leaves us amazed. It has been called the period of the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, and it was tremendously proud of all that this new weapon, wielded by men of genius, had been able to conquer. Europe had expanded its horizon in every direction; politically and financially it built the large empires that are still our pride, and our embarrassment. The new world and Asia became vital treasure houses to be systematically exploited, or to be brought into the embrace of the exploiter. Human thought and human knowledge likewise were being reduced to order and human conduct studied so that the organization of society should rest upon no insecure foundations. All this the century had done, or had planned, and it was proud of its achievement, and rightly. In literature too it had reason to be greatly self-satisfied. Though there were no Shakespeares, Montaignes, or Molières, there were others who by the century were thought not inferior; the level of intellectual attainment was high; and the reading and thinking public larger than ever before in the world's history. In this general feeling of com-

mendation, why worry anyway about genius? for, being more often allied to madness, it ought to be distrusted—it might be dangerous.

The work of genius was being accomplished, in any case, in more practical fields. And the victories of the great scientists of the age leave us still full of honest admiration. Newton in a lifetime created the new world of mathematical physics, and gave science the clue, it was long thought, to the whole secret of matter and life. And he was but the best known. The sciences of chemistry, botany, biology, zoölogy, all owe their modern form to the work done by men who had first to invent their apparatus—and crude enough it was in those days—before they could ask nature an intelligent question and expect in the laboratory to discover as intelligent an answer. But the answers of nature are always intelligent to those who question intelligently, so ran the confident great postulate of eighteenth century science. And it must be allowed that with this answer the age went far. The magnificent flourish of the imagination of the sixteenth century was lacking; rather it was like the slow frontal attack of a Roman legion.

The century was equally bold in the field of the human sciences. The fertility of some of the minds: John Locke gave the world enough to think about in philosophy, psychology, political science, to keep it busy for a century and more. He became the constitution of the century, for which succeeding thinkers wrote the by-laws. And curiously it was his idea on the "natural rights" of man that became of such terrible force in the days of revolution that were to follow. Adam Smith gave a book that created the science of economics, *The Wealth of Nations*. It was near the last quarter of the century that in France was conceived the idea of gathering into one book all available knowledge, and of

making it thus accessible to all. Thus came that *Grand Encyclopedie* with which are associated the names of many brilliant men, under the inspiring leadership of Diderot:

"To bring together in a dictionary all that has been discovered in the sciences, what is known of the productions of the globe, the details of the arts which men have invented, the principles of morals, the metaphysics of language and the rules of grammar, the analysis of our faculties, and even the history of our opinions."

A perfectly rational world, this we live in, so the eighteenth century thought it, a rational and orderly world of nature and society, in which the farthest star, the least of men, and the minutest of organisms, all revolve in their orbits, chanting the praise of reason and obedience. Nothing eccentric, nothing adventurous, nothing excessively individual, for such variations might endanger the welfare of the whole, just as a planet or a star might fly from its orbit and run amuck among the orderly battalions of heaven. A utilitarianism, enlightened to be sure, but nevertheless with its nose always pointed toward the larger issue. You cannot quarrel with it, you cannot love it, but you can hate it. But worse, it looked mightily like a determinism also, this living without the adventure of risk and following the pointing finger of collective reason. It was as though man himself with all his genius and spiritual powers were reduced to the inert rôle of a physical Sun. He may come trailing clouds of glory, but they were part of the huge paraphernalia of the cosmic system; like the minutest and most insignificant, he was but one who obeyed the higher voice. Is it to be wondered at that when the protest came it was long and loud?

It was the strange genius, Rousseau, a man who towers infinitely above his contemporaries, and is for better or for

worse, or for both, the greatest figure of the last century and a half, it was Rousseau who first made the voice of protest clearly heard and gave it a philosophy. So familiar are we with many of his ideas, that it is difficult for us now to conceive how startlingly improper he must have appeared to the orthodox of his generation. To them life was all as clear as a geometric problem, and as impeccable:

"In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, what ever is is right."

Rousseau suddenly discovered two things—they came to him like a dizzying inspiration, like one of those calls to the prophets, "Thus saith the Lord"—that reason may not and probably is not man's keenest weapon, and that certainly whatever is is not right, but often is most diabolically wrong. He did crack, even shatter, the supreme confidence of his century in man's powers, man's destiny, and the eternal rationality of man's institutions and the universe in general. That there are mysteries, not here and there, but in life as a whole, that reason can never discover, let alone understand, but that man has other powers with which to possess them, this became one of his prize thoughts—in the very day of the *Encyclopedia* which was to banish mystery, and carefully label and pigeonhole nature. It was an upheaval; and for the want of a better name we call it the romantic revolt.

It began and ended in a distrust of reason, as the eighteenth century had defined reason, the kind of reason Pope describes in his *Essay on Man*, and Montaigne sets up for a guide in life. This thing that for nearly two hundred years Europe had been trusting, and using in its marvelous sciences of nature and society, now to Rousseau became a quite secondary and often wholly misleading guide for life.

For it never sees things as they are, but only their surface. For deeper insight, for a truer grasp on reality, let man trust his sentiment, his emotions, his intuition, you may call it even his instinct if you will, and it will never fail. For it is this immediate response of the unspoiled soul to things through the well known primary emotions, like love or hate, that reveals best their inner nature. It is the kind of thing that Wordsworth celebrates in such poems as *Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey* or the Ode, *Intimations of Immortality*, not the power that dissects, classifies, and analyzes, but one with a potent immediacy that recognizes spiritual kinships; it was this power that Rousseau would exalt.

With this came a natural assertion of the right of the individual to freedom, as against the bondage of reason and society. For man is by nature an immortal soul, and endowed by nature with the attribute of goodness, natural goodness, and anything that in any way distorts or impairs the naturally good workings of the human personality, is an evil to be wrestled with and destroyed. The natural goodness of man—the phrase is still heard. It furnished Rousseau with the motive for his most read book to-day, his *Emile*, his contribution to the theory of education. Compare it with Montaigne. Man, society, philosophy, these to Montaigne are the sources of wisdom. Rousseau would get as far away from man and society as is possible. “Adieu Paris”, he writes, for nothing fine or natural is to be expected from such a place of inbred evil. Since the primary instincts of love and piety and goodness are the objects to be sought, one cannot be too far away from the corruption of society. There in the sweet haunts of nature let the child grow up, encouraging his natural aptitudes and allowing free play to his natural sweetness. The picture, the



dithyrambic nature of the whole book, is ravishing, when placed beside the plain prose of Montaigne and his common sense.

This belief in the natural goodness of man as against the old orthodox belief of Dante, of Milton, of all the Enlightenment, is not an unnatural revolt. Rousseau had been brought up in the Calvinistic city of Geneva, with Calvin's creed as rigid and mathematically impeccable as a geometric theorem. The theologian had demonstrated against all rational appeal the states of salvation and damnation, and the meaning and office of divine grace. The only escape was by the romantic revolt of the conscience and emotions, and Rousseau's was the natural outburst of an ardent spirit much in love himself with the idea of humanity, if not with individual human beings, and burning with the zeal of a crusader.

So society and social institutions which are only for the suppression of the free individual, or the hampering of his free development, fall under ardent suspicion. The determinism of the social order, the free expression of individual aspiration—the conflict is as old as humanity itself, and has resulted in bloodshed from the days when our first ancestor carved himself a bludgeon to brain his rival. Montaigne taught wise and reasonable adjustment; Rousseau the explosion of individual protest and the dream of a perfect state where all can at the same time be free and equal. He saw as clearly as Montaigne man's fatal paradox, the urge of aspiration and the fetters of pitiful opportunity. Montaigne taught restraint and urged a curb, Rousseau dwelt with his head in the clouds of unfettered dreams, with his feet pitifully protesting the shards on the pathway.

To be really happy is thus impossible in this unequal world. Away with it then and back to savage simplicity

and the blessings of primitive wants that find ever their primitive satisfactions. The love of the primitive, of unspoiled savages—Montaigne, again, had talked about these, but with his tongue in his cheek. Rousseau ardently held out his arms to them, pleading to be saved from the perils of civilized life. For among them, and among them alone, is life the adventure that the spirit of man craves, the search and discovery of the great mystery of the natural and spiritual world that man's science has striven to destroy or to reduce to algebraic figures and formulæ. What is the worth of the prism to him who sees the brush of the Almighty stroke by stroke add to the mysterious glory of the rainbow? What are the laws of moving bodies to him who watches with silent emotion the swell and ebb of the tides? Mystery, adventure, these soul cravings that science and social institutions would hide under the bushel of formulas and inhibitions, these the primitive mind can enjoy with utter absence of scientific conjecture.

To such, God is not a theological dogma, as reasoned in the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas or the theology of Calvin; he is a spirit in nature and man, as vital as a friend, and as little susceptible of geometric truth. See what Rousseau had to say about him, before transcendental philosophy had discovered a way of saying it more learnedly:

"A spirit lost in this immensity. I did not think, or reason, or philosophize, but with a kind of voluptuous delight I felt myself overwhelmed with the weight of the universe. I freed myself with rapture from the confusion of these great ideas; I loved in imagination to lose myself in space; my heart bound up in the confines of things found itself too straitened; I was suffocating in the universe. I longed to thrust myself into the infinite. I believe that if I had laid bare all the mysteries of nature I should have felt myself in a less delightful situation than this stupefying ecstasy, in which my spirit freed itself without restraint, and which in the agitation of my transport made me sometimes cry,

'Great existence!' without the power of speaking or thinking anything further."

Perhaps Rousseau's greatest book, and most interesting, is his *Confessions*. It was written to justify himself before a world grown critical of the man who once was a social lion, in the days when a malady was fixing its hold upon his temper and imagination. But the book itself reveals few of these latter defects. The spirit of it, at a time when autobiographies or memoirs were not uncommon, is its challenging quality. It is something new—an apology without precedent. It is an explosive utterance of the inner emotional man that has no other interest than in contemplating its own explosion. This is a quality which comes to distinguish this new romantic age, an intense emotional preoccupation with one's own personal reactions to experience.

"I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature, and this man shall be myself. I know my heart, and have studied mankind. I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps not like any one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mold with which she formed me, can only be determined after reading this work.

"Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign Judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim: Thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I. With equal freedom and veracity I have related what was laudable or wicked; I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues; and if I have sometimes introduced superfluous ornament, it was merely to occupy a void occasioned by defect of memory. I may have supposed certain that which I only knew to be probable, but I have never asserted as truth a conscious falsehood. Such as I was, I have declared myself; sometimes vile and despicable, at others virtuous, generous, and sublime. Even as Thou hast read my inmost soul, Power Eternal, assemble around Thy throne an

innumerable throng of my fellow mortals, let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings; let each in turn expose with equal sincerity the failings, the wanderings of his heart, and, if he dare, aver, 'I was better than that man'."

Montaigne had studied himself and gave us a philosophy of life, for he had examined conduct as the scientist examines cellular growth. Marcus Aurelius had examined himself and he gave us a theory of ethics and metaphysics, for he saw each act of life in a vast cosmic panorama of life, death, and immortality. Rousseau examines himself and gives us a phantasmagoria of emotional pyrotechnics, an inner fireworks as it were, discharges set off by this or that indifferent occasion, but brilliant with the emotion of his always quivering personality. Preoccupation with self as though oneself were a sort of electric cell emitting discharges, whose merit is to be measured by the ardency and frequency of the disturbances. This is Rousseau, living in an emotional atmosphere of his own creation; and this is to be one of the distinguishing merits or demerits of this new age. You may not like it, but you cannot fail to be interested, and perhaps instructed.

The new age was generous. Never has the human spirit so ardently responded to human needs. See Rousseau burst out against social injustice:

"The sentiment of indignation, which in its origin had reference only to myself, has acquired such strength, and is at present so completely detached from personal motives, that my heart is as much inflamed at the sight or relation of any act of injustice (whatever may be the object, or wheresoever it may perpetrated) as it would be if I were the immediate sufferer.

The age was disarmingly impractical. Hear Rousseau again—"Money is the perpetual source of uneasiness; I

fear it more than I love good wine." It hated only tyrants, society in general, and orthodox critics. It was into this age that the youthful Goethe came, and it was in the flower of the romantic movement that he did his best work. He was to become at the same time its severest critic and its most potent influence.

## II. GOETHE

"Man still must err, while he doth strive . . .  
A good man in his darkest aberration,  
Of the right path is conscious still."

GOETHE, *Faust*.

Goethe was one of those fortunate beings that all poets, doubtless, wish themselves to be; and yet—one wonders if the world had touched this man a little less gently, if his lines had not always fallen in pleasant places and beside still waters, whether he would not have been . . . it is idle to speculate. He just missed being one of the very greatest, of the select circle that Dante, were he to return from the haunts of past poets, would describe as the *arbitri artis poeticæ*. Homer, of course, Shakespeare, and Dante—these are the trinity of supreme genius; Virgil and Lucretius and certainly Milton, as a second halo, about the first; and for prose, Montaigne, Cervantes—the next place is blank, perhaps our coming age with its prose instincts may supply the third for a triple trinity, that Dante finds so full of meaning in his *Paradise*.

In his *Wilhelm Meister*, Goethe has a lyric that is often quoted, but whose significance is not always clear. I give a paraphrase: "Who never ate his bread in sorrow, nor bedewed his pillow with tears, knows not ye, ye Heavenly powers". Goethe wept tears, and ate the bread of sorrow,

as he confesses in his *Poetry and Truth from My Life*, his autobiography; but they were idle, sentimental tears in the main, and his bread of sorrow, not the crust of great renunciation or bitter grief. Goethe was not Dante, a disappointed, disillusioned man, an exile from home, treading the steep path from Hell to Heaven, and finding for each infernal crag a heavenly recompense—in his own soul. Nor was he Shakespeare, with an imagination that could rival the stars, forced to play the afternoon's entertainment to a vapid London audience. There were none of those paradoxes in the life of this German, born under a star that kept his foot from slipping.

Perhaps he found the life of his time too complex for its perfect fusion into one great poem. Milton succeeded in the century before, as did Virgil in the largest days of the world's greatest empire; but it required for each a lifetime devoted to study and poetry. Neither was an idle singer, gathering his inspiration as a butterfly the honey, sipping carelessly from flower to flower. It was hard, hard, and the agony of each to master his theme is apparent in the ease of the verse, and its utter adequacy. But Goethe is rarely adequate, like the true amateur he always remained; his verse is what comes easiest; when clearness is obvious it is clear, but where the path becomes hard to follow, and its twists and complexities great, he resorts to the easiest substitute, allegory and *Sprüche*—words of wisdom—and the reader needs a commentary. No guide book is needed to go with Virgil or Homer or Dante through the sempiternal regions; but Goethe's *Faust*—we shall come to this in <sup>or</sup> <sup>mediate</sup> Perhaps it was the German in him that at times made love obscurity.

But Goethe is great—unquestionably great—greater than any poet since Milton, and his like, even in prose. I

not been seen since Montaigne and Cervantes. He is most modern, too, the most modern of all great authors, for he touches the perplexities of modern life at its most relevant points, and has his wisdom for most of our ills. And he is lyrical, exquisitely lyrical, in this age that seems to want to forget that there are rhythms in mood and language, and would substitute the weathered crag for the polished diamond. Only one thing was denied him, or two, great tragedy and great comedy. Perhaps he was too modern for these, perhaps life touched him too caressingly for him to know the significance of the grotesque and the terrible. For these he offers us wisdom. There is a peace of mind above laughter and tears, and such was Goethe's.

The youthful Goethe was immersed in the flood when the pent-up emotions of two centuries gave way. It is of the passionate exultation of that period in Germany that he writes the inspired poetry, and for a time he was almost its acknowledged leader.

*"Trunken müssen wir alle sein;  
Jugend ist Trunkenheit ohne Wein."*

This gorgeous call to youthful intoxication, youth intoxicated by the joy of its youth, catches him first and makes of him the charming lyric poet that he was always to remain.

But there was ever a sterner note in Goethe's creed, an eternal restlessness that drove him ceaselessly from one accomplished attitude to the next. He himself writes, "generally when a work was finished it became uninteresting to me; I thought of it no more, but busied myself with some new plan." His whole life was a series of accommodations to experience, but any one experience must not become a habit. Or, as he said of the *Marienbad Elegy*,

it was "the product of a highly impassioned mood. While I was in it I would not for the world have been without it; and now I would not for any consideration fall into it again." There is something Faustian in this wise remark, so wise it seems almost cold. But it was the same eager acceptance and, after tasting deeply, final rejection, that is the story of his courtship of and swift marriage to and as swift divorce from, the thing that is usually called the *Storm and Stress*.

But while yet in heart and soul sympathy with the insurgents he wrote two pieces which together are perhaps better than anything the young poets had yet produced. They were the drama, tragedy perhaps, of *Goetz von Berlichingen*, and the sentimental, cheerless novel of *Werther*. But it is not the qualities of these, for they are never more than mediocre, that gives them a notice now, nor their plots, for they are never excellent; rather the plain fact that they reveal something essentially novel in the character of this yet unknown genius. Goethe's whole life was a search for the ideal personality, the manner of life and the motives that would draw out all of a man's best powers and reveal beauty of character. Only at different periods in his career he looked in different places for this much desired treasure. And *Goetz* and *Werther* represent his first experiment and his sudden blaze of popularity.

*Goetz* is the story of an early robber baron, a German Rob Roy, fearless in war, true to his pledge and his faith to his emperor, generous to his own vassals, and affectionate to his family; but a robber, and he was proud of his profession, a charming "blond beast", whom it became society's business to suppress. But our sympathies, here as in Scott's novel, are with this resolute upholder of an antiquated and unsocial tradition. He was unbusinesslike; his inroads



upon his neighbors made him a bad citizen, in spite of his romantic glamor, and they combined against him. The unromantic police, as is the manner of good business, put him down. Yet one thinks almost of Socrates pleading his case, so convinced is the old robber in the law of the sword and the rights of the free. It was moral independence that was being jeopardized by those who would make bargain a substitute for honor. He is a charming fellow, very much more attractive in the pages of the play or on the stage than he would be on a lonely road. And one's breath catches a little as at the end the broken hero takes his farewell of his wife. It is the allegory of the new age of law, when as it seemed all freedom was giving place to the new social order:

*"Poor wife! I leave you in a fallen world. . . . Close your hearts as carefully as your doors. The time of treason is at hand, into its power has freedom fallen. The unworthy shall rule with cunning, and the noble shall fall into their nets."*

It is hard, it is impossible, to condemn this disarming anachronism; and Goethe does not wish us to. For the hero is a symbol of the freedom the new age so ardently desired, the pure freedom of the human spirit that cuts across the laws and penalties of a social creed, even if it destroys itself in the process.

Werther is a younger and sentimental brother of Goetz, born perhaps two hundred years later, when Germany had been tamed and all the Goetzes subdued to the life of the narrow bourgeoisie. You admire Goetz, you pity Werther, and could wish that his star had been more favorable, or his moral balance a trifle more steady. He too pants for freedom, but it is the freedom of the dreamy child, not freedom of action; he would reach out his hand and grasp

the moon, he would have all his dreams come true and castles in Spain as solid realities, and the young woman he falls in love with return his passion. Only Werther lacks balance, he knows not how to look a dream in the face and call it by its right name; and because he fails in this common sense respect for one's practical limitations, this poor lad picks up a pistol. It was the one grim reality he faced, and it performed its function admirably. The novel was successful, ironically successful, for there was a general popping of pistols over Germany among young would-be Werthers. *Werther* was popular because it was so hopelessly impossible. These young men and women of the Storm and Stress, like the White Knight of Alice, loved the impossible; they had learned eagerly to believe in it, until it to them became the only reality.

Freedom through the love of the unreal, the undisciplined, the unsocial, in this curious brand of individualism Goethe first sought for the finest and truest development of human personality. The harder a man discovers the odds between his dreams and the world of nature and society to be, the nobler his personality. A curious doctrine; and for his heroes an old robber baron and a puling sentimentalist whose use of the pistol one can't condemn. Much as these were popular in his own time, had Goethe written nothing else, there would be no Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to delay us to-day. These victims of their own undulating emotions are not world figures nor much in the serious tradition of literature. Each tries to make the world in his own image, and rule like a god in his own world; but this prerogative Deity has not yet surrendered.

Goethe himself quickly saw that he was on the wrong path in his search. For later he could thus fall upon the flanks of his former admirers:

"All the poets write as if they were ill and the whole world a lazaretto. They all speak of the woe and misery of this earth, and of the joys of a hereafter; all are discontented, and one draws another into a state of still greater discontent. This is a real abuse of poetry, which was given us to hide the little discords of life, and to make man contented with the world and his condition. But the present generation is afraid of all such strength, and is only poetical when it has weakness to deal with."

And now, with his call to the little Grand Duchy of Weimar, and his gradual introduction to some of the more serious problems of life, after his graduation from the university, began his real education, a process that this wise man never allowed to be discontinued. The result is that Goethe the personality is really greater than any of his works; he is his own greatest triumph, his masterpiece. For all of his works strike us as fragmentary, though in the great *Weimar Edition* they have enough volumes to fill a library. Was it a sense of the lack of completeness of any single experience in itself? For even in the *Wilhelm Meister*, *Faust*, or a poem like the *Elegies*, or a pure novel like the *Elective Affinities*, one has the feeling of something lacking that one never has in a poem like Dante's or in any of the plays of Shakespeare. It is almost true to say that throughout his life he remained the great amateur, the greatest amateur of letters, and that his greatest concern was with the personality of the man who most interested him, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Him he perfected. One does not need to supplement the *Iliad* by a line from the life of Homer; the meager facts from the life of Shakespeare seem to detract from rather than to add to the value of *Hamlet*; but Goethe—one must know the man to read his works, so essentially are they fragmentary glimpses, lyrically short or dramatically long, of this many-sided genius.

common; and life in nature thus becomes an adaptation of each individual to the needs of itself and of all of its neighbors. Life, adaptation, these again come to be almost synonymous; and evolution is the story of the gradual unfolding of the life of nature expressed in the adaptation of species to species, individual to individual. The thought was staggering to his poetic imagination. If nature thus at each moment is an equilibrium, and the story of nature the substitution of equilibrium for equilibrium, as the lives and characters of the individuals gradually unfold, why not apply the same thought to society? Cannot man and his relation to society, indeed the whole state of society, be said to be an equilibrium gained through restless and resistless development, equilibrium after equilibrium, one gained to give place to another; and is not man's story, like nature's, the history of a long evolution?

The modern student of science smiles at the crudity and at times the transcendental mysticism of Goethe's theory of evolution. But it had at its core the great truth of adaptation. This he will apply now to his study of human nature, and it will serve as the key to his search for the thing of most value in personality—the subject he had devoted his life to. Science did at least this great double service to Goethe, it made him objective, and it gave him the rough plan of a definition of what he wanted. He will now no longer glorify the Goetzes and the Werthers who are least adapted to their worlds, rather his imagination will soar less high, for these had both sought the unattainable.

Then Goethe had his friends; they were many and some distracting. But it was Schiller who perhaps more than any other drew from the poet the best and gave the best in return. The friendship between these remarkable men is one of the significant things in literary history—so per-

fectly did they supplement each other, Goethe the greater genius, Schiller the more earnest, and to whom his art was a sacred mission: the one dreaming of human perfectibility in terms of the perfect individual, the other dreaming of humanity as a whole and longing for its entire regeneration.

But far more alluring to the biographer because more indefinable was his friendship with Frau von Stein; was she a mother to this youthful genius—she was some years his senior—or an elder sister, or a mistress, or all three? Goethe had always been susceptible to the charm of woman, he was ever to be; and woman was to be to him something of what she had been to the poet of chivalry, to Saint Bernard, to Dante, and to the unknown sculptor of the Venus of Milo. There is not a play or a novel, hardly a lyric, in which her tempering influence is not seen. She is the inspiration and reward of poetry as of every worthy endeavor. One wonders where, how, and why Goethe took what with the other romantic poets of his age is the nebulous figure of the unattainable, and transformed it into the essence of poetry and art. "*Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan.*" The eternal feminine draws us upward.

So the poet makes a sharp distinction between the masculine and the feminine powers in life and art. To man life is progress, a ceaseless grasping for the new; he is the active aggressive force, passionate, disorderly, uncultivated. With him life is a struggle, and his end, if unaided, a tragedy, as Egmont's, as Faust's might have been without the influence of Helena. Woman is the inspiration of order. She is love, sentiment, insight, not cold logic—this is for man and cold comfort in a world of passion—but the higher reason that by virtue of its inner nature is able to discern truth. She is instinct, she is truth, she is love—in these regions of sentiment where these words become synony-

mous. To discover what is fitting one must inquire of noble woman. Such was the answer Goethe received, or thought he received, when as a hopeless idealist he came to this practical court, asking for a fitting region in which he might work, and it was the calming influence of woman that gave him the clue.

How different this from Milton, the Puritan poet of Protestantism, who could see the charm and loveliness of woman and art, who dedicated his whole life to the stern morals of an austere creed, and yet who always trembled like a guilty thing surprised in the presence of beauty—its unacknowledged worshipper, and also its most fearful votary. To him woman was the torment and also the balm, the influence disturbing man's single pursuit of the main issue, and yet the lovely reward of the pursuit of beauty. This paradox—a real paradox to many minds—Goethe was never to feel.

To him woman is the soothing, clarifying influence whose wise presence in moments of passionate perplexity, like a divine catalytic suddenly clears the waters, dissipates doubts and fears, precipitates the unwanted and the disturbing, and renders the soul pure and master of itself. See the poor storm-tossed, fury-pursued Orestes in the *Iphigenia* fleeing in passionate remorse from the murder of his mother, his soul torn with conflict and in an agony of madness, searching vainly for rest; suddenly see his passion give place to manly resolution and peace by the mere presence and touch of his sister *Iphigenia*, who too has known suffering, but triumphant has risen into the region of perfect calm. See her place the cool hand of comfort on the fevered brow of her distressed brother, and bring him to peace. This was Goethe, this is Goethe, the poet who was in every one of his later works to celebrate the refining, ordering, calming,

inspiring, influence of woman. Helena brings to Faust the knowledge of himself, of creative art, of the good life, and makes possible his final regeneration; Iphigenia lifts from the ancient house of Agamemnon the ancestral curse; these are the tokens of woman's powers, as the poet would recreate the ancient ideals of chivalry.

How different, too, this is from the view of Racine. To him woman is the secret of passion, or unordered emotion, of tragedy. Phèdre, Hermione, Andromache, Athalie, these are women whom their passions control utterly, and from whose passions spring the motives of tragedy. Goethe's heroines are never tragic, they avert tragedy from the men whom they love. Yet they are not like the ladies of chivalry or the Beatrice of Dante. There is no ascetic compromise in Goethe, as the old chivalric heroes sought it; woman is a restraining, guiding influence, and yet woman, and not a religious ideal. The Madonna would scarce care to be numbered among Goethe's heroines, and the sainted Mary of Magdala, though in a more aesthetic atmosphere, might fancy herself still in her sins. It is chivalry shorn of its austere code and drenched with a new aesthetics; it offers the old prayer to beauty, but it caresses also the lovely creature of flesh and blood. Still less is it like the Beatrice of Dante, whose heavenly origin and love and knowledge Dante could worship also from afar. For when the supreme vision was granted to Dante he stood alone, save for the pious figure of Saint Bernard, and Beatrice was at such a distance "as from the place of highest thundering" to the deepest sea. So would not Goethe have his lady in the moments when the highest bliss abounds, but like the yet not fully chastened Dante he ever longs to catch the light of heaven only in her eyes and its bliss in the warmth of her arms.

And yet Goethe was never able to do what Shakespeare did so well, create his women as distinct personalities; here he is even less successful than Dante, whose Beatrice, though she is a lovely symbol, is also a most potent woman. The figures of Iphigenia, of Clärchen, of Mignon in *Wilhelm Meister*, of Helena, are not quite freed from the mystic veil of aesthetic loveliness. They are perfect as the Greek female figures in marble are perfect, with the dazzling radiance of perfected types; they are not portraits but ideals brought down to earth and given human semblance. One could hardly ask one to tea any more than one could take such liberties with the Nike of Samothrace or the Venus of Milo.

For the feminine with the German poet became almost synonymous with art. Art is creative activity, freely operative in a more perfect world than that of real life; it has repose and balance, as against the passionate disturbance of lives without art. Contrast the story of Margaret in *Part I* of *Faust* with that of Helena in *Part II*. In the first Faust is striving to lose himself in the passion of the moment, and he discovers nothing but tragic disillusionment and loss. In the second, where Helena stands for the ideal of ancient beauty, Faust finally discovers the secret of creative repose. Art is imaginative activity, or real activity, but directed to attainable ends. So that a man of true culture can be an artist in each of the least of his acts. It is the life to which form and completeness and perfect self-knowledge has been given, against the bafflement and incompleteness of the ineffective life of the common man. Hence, as in *Meister*, art, self-knowledge, the attainment of wisdom, become words interchangeable and the object of all is true education.

The result of all of these influences was the personality



of the man Goethe, as we see it in his writings, as we see it perhaps even better in his life, a man of singular activity, and yet whose whole life after Weimar seems a fruitful repose. Like Montaigne he was the one man who kept his peace of mind, in an age of intense agitation, of clamor of new ideas, of war and desolation, when even his city became the headquarters of the invading soldiers of Napoleon and his own home a barracks.

The story of the development of a character like this is told us in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. This is not an interesting novel, if one reads for the story, but is full of suggestion for those who would see some of Goethe's thought at its best. Young Meister is the young Goethe, born bourgeois, and anxious to escape the narrow outlook and the narrow professionalism that was then the fate of all in the middle classes. Meister tries this and that. Like Goethe he discovers wise guides, by accident; he makes errors, like Goethe, by the score; but using his errors wisely he turns experience to account and comes out wise, and like Goethe, an aristocrat of culture. The book is a plea for the best individualism then possible for middle class Germany; no life of political or social activity yet, but wisely restrained culture, an equilibrium, a knowledge of man's limitations, and a refusal to venture beyond. "Man's duty is to live in harmony with the universe, not to shun the problems of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible." This is the theme of reasonable self-restraint as also of reasonable self-expression. It has in it also the wise self-forgetfulness, the sign of the classical gentleman, because this is based upon the fullest and justest self-confidence. Such a man is Goethe's aristocrat of culture.

Such a man has a just appreciation of the world in which he lives; and he has what Goethe called the Three Reverences—reverence for what is below him, for he knows its value; reverence for what is his equal, for he must live with this in peace and mutual aid; reverence for that which is above him, for this is the unattainable. This man also will have no fear of mingling wisely in the affairs of life, for he will know how to direct his energy and husband his forces. It is interesting that the motto, near the end of the story, selected to guide the hero, is "Think to Live." The aim of Goethe's novel is the wise life; and its philosophy, not how to die well, but how to live, how to discover this precious equilibrium, that in both nature and the life of man, is the process and aim of evolution.

The most fascinating as the most irritating, the most thoughtful as the most irrelevant at times, of all of Goethe's works is the famous *Faust*. Its range challenges comparison with the *Divine Comedy* and the *Paradise Lost*; and yet the amateur Goethe is never more obvious than in this play's strange unevenness, its incompleteness, its change of theme, and yet its magnificent power. What in a lesser man would have been a tragic failure with this poet is his greatest success. Most readers get only as far as *Part I*, but this is to miss all the concluding cantos of a great poem; most readers with Gounod's opera in mind see a prima donna heroine in Margaret, and this is quite to lose perspective and see with less than half an eye; most pass hurriedly over the allegorical scenes as irrelevant, but this is to miss what in the obvious irrelevancy is the deepest of Goethe's wisdom. What is worst of all, and a thing for which the poet must be censured, the play must be read with some critical comment. Especially in the chartless forest of *Part II* even

the wariest will lose his way. And no poet great, or small, has quite the right to demand so much even of a careful and devoted reader. It is one thing to be obscure because the thought is profound or extraordinary, it is quite another to be wilfully perverse. And Goethe seemed to love to lose his way in the labyrinth of allegory. But the result of the search for a clue is worth the effort.

The story of the man who sold himself to the devil for a period, in return for knowledge and perfect power, is one of those things that was only too liable to grow up in the ardent days of the early Renaissance. Faust himself was a real personage, a sort of gifted charlatan who lived about the time of Luther, to the horror and edification of all good people. The stories of his doings became household words, and popular story book after story book was put out as a warning of his dreadful fate. Marlowe, the gifted English dramatist, was the first to see the wonderful possibilities of the story for the stage; and his *Doctor Faustus* was one of the great dramas before Shakespeare. It went to Germany and for two centuries almost, in drama and puppet play, was a kind of spring tonic for purging youth who might love power and knowledge not wisely but too well. Goethe took this folk drama and some of its scenes and made of it a miracle of modern thought.

It was a medieval or early renaissance story, the protest of the orthodox Middle Ages that believed in the Devil ardently, and would have none of his works, and yet flirted constantly with the idea of magic, necromancy, and alchemy. Goethe turns his back on this part of the minatory essence of the plot, gives the devil a quite modern character, almost disinfests him of his medieval balefulness, and makes a gentleman of him, able gracefully to exchange compliments with the Almighty. No, Mephistoph-

eles, like summer lightning, is hardly dangerous, to a man like Faust. And as a result Faust is saved, not damned as the theologian would have him, even though for years he had the devil at his elbow, perhaps even because of the infernal companionship. There are uses even for the devil, so runs Goethe's mind, in this scientific age, when everything good and bad, so called, must contribute to progress. Only we shall have to revise somewhat our definitions; so he calls him Mephistopheles, a less sinister name; and Milton's Satan and Dante's are banished from the stage.

Goethe was at work on this all of his long lifetime. He began it before he had left his home for Weimar, he worked on it at odd intervals, and at the earnest solicitation of Schiller published the first part in the first decade of the nineteenth century, more than thirty years after he had begun the work. Then urged by friends, from time to time he worked on the second part, planned from the beginning, but whose character gradually underwent transformation. But he did not give this to the press until 1832, the very year of his death. So the work has in it the thought of sixty years. Early youth to dying manhood—it is the story of Goethe's own life, the distillation of the best of his powers.

*Faust* is not a story, any more than the *Divine Comedy* is a plot like Homer's *Iliad*. It is the progress of the human soul in its efforts to achieve the height of wise personality, and the scenes are the stages on the journey. It, like Dante's *Divine Comedy* has for its theme the scope and meaning of life, from its heights to its depths, and the means of salvation. Virgil and Beatrice were the guides who kept the Italian poet's feet from stumbling and carried him unerring to the heights; but the ironical Goethe has as guide for Faust Mephistopheles the spirit of error and false-

hood, of the temporal as against the eternal; man saved from error by error, no longer man saved by true philosophy and divine guidance supernaturally afforded. In making adjustments in spite of error, man, like nature, must make for spiritual progress and spiritual equilibrium. Experience is in effect an experiment in the art of living, to be judged coolly by the reason, and even sin has its value. Somewhere Goethe has written, the wise man, like the fool, makes errors, but he never repeats them.

Like Milton, then, Goethe is striving to justify the presence of evil in nature and man; only unlike Milton he will not take error too seriously. To the Puritan poet the words of scripture were only too true:—"Woe unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." Milton's Satan is damned! These are no half-way measures, though there are certain compensations. Goethe's Mephistopheles is only half-damned and a good part of the time quite unaware of it, and always coolly philosophical about it. He could never have exclaimed, with the greater Satan:

"Me miserable! which way shall I fly  
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?  
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;  
And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,  
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n."

Instead he is quite calm. He is neither proud nor resolute, and knows no infernal dignity. Like Satan, he would never have exclaimed:

"To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n."

Without the Miltonic Satan's admirable and chivalric virtues, he even cringes in the presence of the Almighty:

"The Ancient One I like sometimes to see,  
And not to break with Him am always civil;  
'Tis courteous in so great a Lord as he,  
To speak so kindly even to the Devil."

And when he comes to Faust, he describes himself as philosophically as though he were a college professor—like Faust. He is

"Part of that power which still  
Produceth good, whilst ever scheming ill. . . .  
The spirit I, which evermore denies!  
And justly; for whate'er to light is brought  
Deserves again to be reduced to naught. . . .  
Part of the part am I, which at the first was all,  
A part of darkness, which gave birth to light,  
Proud light, who now his mother would enthrall,  
Contesting space and ancient rank with night. . . .  
And so, I trust, when comes the final wreck,  
Light will, ere long, the doom of matter share."

He is at his best in his betrayal of himself by his worldly wisdom, his cynicism, in such scenes as this with the college student:

"Five lectures daily you must hear;  
The hour still punctually observe!  
Yourself with studious zeal prepare,  
And closely in your manual look,  
Hereby may you be quite aware  
That all he utters standeth in the book;  
Yet write away without cessation,  
As at the Holy Ghost's dictation!"

Here he is almost a dean of men, or perhaps a professor of an inverted philosophy. What did Goethe mean by Meph-

istopheles? Milton's devil is plain evil, in eternal conflict with the good, and producing, as a result, ethical character. Goethe's is equally cosmic, but more metaphysical or aesthetic perhaps than ethical, and as necessary. He too helps prepare character, but with a difference; and he has a deal, a diabolically large deal, of worthy worldly wisdom. You do not admire him as you do Satan, but you almost like him.

To touch man's life thus at all points, and to trace the gradual regeneration of the human soul through wisely directed experience, under the devil's guidance, would require a huge poem, an *Earthly Comedy*, or a novel; but Goethe chose rather the form of a drama. This choice at once restricted him. He could not have scenes enough to show the process realistically—audiences, even in Germany, must eat at reasonable intervals, and they do get bored. So there is a mixture of realism and allegory, allegory to represent in brief a variety of experience that otherwise would take hours of stage business, and allegorical personages to represent various conflicting virtues and vices. This was an old trick with the medieval stage and Goethe borrowed it.

Finally the whole drama presents the theme—always present to Goethe—that doubt and bewilderment in themselves are inevitable, and can be escaped only by a life actively directed. It is only by action that man discovers the difference between truth and error; theory is gray as dust, it is only the active life that bears fruit. It is the devil that says this, but Goethe's devil is true oftener than false.

So the poet proceeds with his theme. In a series of prologues he comments on his own play, and the *Prologue in Heaven* is vital. The background is borrowed from the

*Book of Job.* God and the angels and Mephistopheles are come together. The angels hymn the cosmic order and progress and beauty of the universe; "And all thy works, sublime, eternal, are fair as on the primal day." But Mephistopheles interposes, he knows nothing of suns and worlds, but of mankind he knows too much.—"I see alone mankind's self-torturing pains." Even Doctor Faust, whom the All-Highest praises, is no better than the rest:

"He serves thee truly in a wondrous fashion.  
 Poor fool! His food and drink are not of earth.  
 An inward impulse hurries him afar,  
 Himself half conscious of his frenzied mood;  
 From heaven claimeth he the fairest star,  
 And from the earth craves every highest good,  
 And all that's near, and all that's far,  
 Fails to allay the tumult in his blood."

Then in the words of the Lord comes the poet's theme, his apologia, as it were, for the whole poem, an illuminated text, coming from the Spirit to whom the whole process of creation from beginning to end is perfectly known:

"So long as he on earth doth live,  
 So long 'tis not forbidden thee.  
 Man still must err, while he doth strive.

. . . . .

Then stand abash'd, when thou perforce must own,  
 A good man in his darkest aberration,  
 Of the right path is conscious still."

To see this theme worked out it is necessary to follow the play through the two parts.

Doctor Faust—the scene in his study is the finest thing in the poem—is the allegory of bewildered and futile humanity, lost as was Pascal between two infinities and yet



unable to comprehend even the narrow little peninsula upon which he stands. He is the romantic answer to the eighteenth century trust in man's powers to master his own world. He has given his whole life to the pursuit of knowledge until now in old age he has discovered that all man's accomplishment is as zero before infinity, and that he has lost the one thing that might have made life worthy—he has not lived. He has sought for the connection between life and knowledge, and fallen between two stools. What is life? he asks; what or where is that supreme knowledge, that master key which shall unlock all doors and reveal the cosmic order? He would be a god; but—

"I may not pretend, aught rightly to know,  
I may not pretend, through teaching, to find  
A means to improve or convert mankind.  
Then I have neither goods nor treasure,  
No worldly honour, rank, or pleasure;  
No dog in such fashion would longer live!"

He turns to magic, perhaps there he can find the clue.

"Thou'lt see  
The courses of the stars unroll'd;  
When nature doth her thoughts unfold  
To thee, thy soul shall rise, and seek  
Communion high with her to hold."

Filled with the newly awakened cosmic emotion, the romantic ecstasy of losing oneself in the contemplation of nature as a whole, he asks the fatal question before which all such romantic brooding must evaporate: "Where shall I grasp thee, infinite nature, where?" Emotion alone is not knowledge, the secret of the universe is not revealed in an intoxication of its infinite power; and so he summons the Earth Spirit, the creative energy of the world to stand and

unfold itself. Magic again has the power and the spectre appears. But the monster is too vast, and Faust starts back in terror; though he has evoked it, he may not grasp it; it has nothing in common with the spirit of man, even a man with the unutterable longings of Faust. And the vision passes. Faust has failed—magic has stirred the imagination to its depths, it has produced intoxication and chimeras, but as for revelation in intelligible, graspable form, it has been no more than his philosophy or logic.

Back again, he is in the depths, and though he may speak unerringly with his *famulus* Wagner of the merits of oratory and of the pursuit of history, of the emptiness of fact until the imagination has clothed it in flesh and blood, he remains Faust the disconsolate, crushed by "humanity's uncertain fate", "like the earthworm writhing in the dust". There is no knowledge, "self torture is the lot of human kind." There may be an escape, and his mind turns to suicide; but as he raises the vial to his lips, there bursts upon his ears the Easter morning carol, "Christ has arisen!" The thought of his pious, unquestioning, and glad infancy comes like a healing.

But this was an anodyne—the comfort of revealed religion, that can have no intelligible proof, good for the voices of angels and children. The next scene is Easter before the gate of the little city, a scene of pastoral bliss, the unthinking solace of those without aspiration. Will this cheerful scene bring rest to the tired spirit? But Faust now is old; in his youth and his mature manhood, when sensuous joys were available, he had refrained, in pursuit of the more coveted goal; how can he now, when his veins are dry and nerves cold, join in the innocent revelry? Besides he has the added weight of dignity and an austere reputation. And though he longs, perhaps for the first time,

for the joys of unreflecting youth, he can make no move. It is the Faustian paradox:

"Two souls, alas! are lodg'd within my breast,  
Which struggle there for undivided reign:  
One to the world, with obstinate desire,  
And closely-cleaving organs, still adheres;  
Above the mist the other doth aspire,  
*With sacred vehemence, to purer spheres.*"

Back in his study; he is translating the Gospel of Saint John when after some medieval pyrotechnics and sorcery, Mephistopheles appears. Please let us not think of him as the bizarre basso of the well known opera, for though somewhat extraordinary in dress to us, he was and is all through the play, only the cynical and disillusioned man of the world in appearance and speech, and somewhat given to low company on occasion, though he has a special attachment to Faust. He is not repulsive, far from it, but he is never enthusiastic; his humor is dry, sometimes bitter, but always wise, up to a certain point. Yes, one should like Mephistopheles, and be willing to associate with him—up to a point. He is a Don Juan or Wandering Jew, turned wise; a curious kind of Sancho Panza to put beside the Don Quixote, the idealist Faust. The two of them together are going to make an excellent and well-conceived personality.

And now the famous compact. The old Faust merely recorded a deed of gift in return for years of power. This Faust is far too shrewd; he has a longer account to settle with himself, and mere power and knowledge will not suffice unless—he will stake his soul on the unless. Unless the Devil can so entangle his soul, longing after the unattainable, that he can say to the passing moment, "Ah stay, thou art so fair," his search will have been in vain. We

shall see that he never says it. For man's capacity is infinite; should he say it he would be denying the fact of progress, of evolution, of eternal growth. Goethe's man is greater in final intelligence than Goethe's devil, and Faust will win the wager.

But now eager to taste life to the uttermost, and at an age when he may not, he sees the bitter futility of the life of renunciation.

"Too old the trifle's part to play,  
Too young to live by no desire possess'd.  
What can the world to me afford?  
Renounce! renounce! is still the word;  
This is the everlasting song  
In every ear that ceaseless rings,  
And which, alas, our whole life long,  
Hoarsely each passing moment sings."

And he utters the curse that shatters forever the world by which he had lived.

"Accurs'd love's dream, of joys the first!  
Accurs'd be hope! accurs'd be faith!  
And more than all, be patience curs'd!"

Now he must build anew, guided by experience, and a slowly gained bitter knowledge—the story of this is the rest of the play.

"Lofty and mighty one,  
Build it once more!  
In thine own bosom the lost world restore!  
Now with unclouded sense  
Enter a new career."

What does Faust want? To touch life at all points, at its heights and depths, to sound its joys and tragedies, in order that he may discover its meaning.

"Hearken! The end I aim at is not joy;  
 I crave excitement, agonizing bliss,  
 Enamour'd hatred, quickening vexation.  
 Purg'd from the love of knowledge, my vocation,  
 The scope of all my powers henceforth be this,  
 To bare my breast to every pang,—to know  
 In my heart's core all human weal and woe,  
 To grasp in thought the lofty and the deep,  
 Men's various fortunes on my breast to heap,  
 And thus to theirs dilate my individual mind,  
 And share at length with them the shipwreck of man-  
 kind."

They go first to Auerbach's cellar to taste the bliss of drunken revelry, and the scene that greets his eye of sots drowned in empty revel is repulsive; and though Mephistopheles plays an amusing trick on the drunken wretches, Faust can see in this nothing that his soul craves. Drink is not the solution to his problem, and he turns away in disgust. His companion thinks he knows what is the matter—Faust though young in enthusiasm is yet the old man of the first scene. He must be rejuvenated, and the next scene is the allegorical one of the witches' kitchen. Here is one of the scenes that repeatedly are to come to annoy a first reader—this doing in allegory of something that can not be done realistically. Medieval allegory is irritating in this day of no mystery; but Goethe loved it, it was part of his romantic inheritance and medieval background. Anyway the rejuvenation of Faust in a realistic scene would be farcical. And at the close, when young and fresh again, with spirit all keen for the new adventure, but with mind alert after years of careful training, he goes forth. With the first flush of youth he has caught in a magic mirror the vision—the thing that will not become a reality until *Part II*, the vision of perfect beauty, Helena. It was the

first gift of transformed youth, it will be the last possession of mature age. Between will lie the abyss.

Now he meets Margaret. She is not the vision. Yet her innocent loveliness is like a breath of intoxication. She is not the heroine, like Juliet, of a love tragedy, though Goethe nearly succeeded in persuading himself that she was. For from his youth onward he often thought of his amours as those of a Don Juan—but serious and lovable—who left behind palpitating hearts; experiences from which he culled melodies for his romantic poems. She is Faust's next adventure in search of the excitement of living that may bring the perfect satisfaction. But it is Faust's first love, and he takes it like romantic youth with heart overflowing with generous and transcendental passion, a torrent of inexpressible emotion. Because it is youthful it is generous, because it comes to the world-weary man it is as impetuous as a river. It is Faust who is the center of the stage; Margaret is only the victim of a wilful passion, a simple village girl, infinitely below him in mind and experience, a beautiful innocent child, but no coloratura soprano heroine. Nor did Goethe intend her to be. She was perhaps the Charlotte Buff of his own early life or the Frederika, but one must not trust the analogy, for there is as much poetry as truth in his autobiography.

But how romantically he is in love; it is the very ecstasy of love. He hies him to the Forest and Cavern that with cosmic nature he may feed this cosmic passion. He is not repentant, he cannot think so far, he is not philosophical, for his emotions are in a whirl, his is yet a love feeding itself wholly on its own substance,—love of the idea of being in love. And when Mephistopheles arrives to precipitate this turbulent mixture and to give it a name and a physical formula and prescription, like the physician who discovers

a simple name and remedy for an ailment we fancy unique, it is Mephistopheles the destroyer of illusions.

"What super-earthly ecstasy! at night,  
To lie in darkness on the dewy height,  
Embracing heaven and earth in rapture high,  
The soul dilating in a deity."

He recommends the remedy:

"It would become so great a lord  
To comfort the enamour'd child,  
And the young monkey for her love reward.  
To her the hours seem miserably long."

And he makes an obscene gesture.

Faust is bitterly indignant, for his passion bore, he thought, another stamp. Margaret to him was an idea, not a creature of flesh and blood, not a thing to be rudely embraced. But Mephistopheles continues:

"This displeases you? 'For shame!'  
You are forsooth entitled to exclaim;  
We to chaste ears it seems must not pronounce  
What, nathless, the chaste heart cannot renounce.  
Well, to be brief, the joy as fit occasions rise,  
I grudge you not, of specious lies.  
But long this mood thou'lt not retain.  
Already thou'rt again outworn,  
And should this last, thou wilt be torn  
By frenzy or remorse and pain."

Faust longs to embrace "earth and heaven in rapture high", but from Mephistopheles he learns that this rapture is only a prelude to an act as common as creation. It will not bring the moment to which he can say "Ah, stay, thou art so fair."

So his romantic dreams are translated into brutal fact; it is the first experience of love that comes to Faust. But

it is love the destroyer. He had seen the true vision in the magic mirror, but he is not ready yet to know the nature of love the creator. For this he will have to wait and suffer. His first experience is only romantic, unbridled passion, with no ideal to give it substance. It is an intoxication as empty as the one that Mephistopheles interrupted in Faust's study. Man may gain experience from these aberrations, but he cannot feed his soul on the vapors of a steaming imagination. Love the destroyer, the destroyer of Faust's peace of mind, and later of Margaret's life. Again it is unlike the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*—for though the fate of these ill-starred lovers is a sad one, each got from the other what his soul craved, one moment, one moment only, of rapturous bliss; and in spite of death it was worth the price. But to Margaret, comes madness, to Faust the bitterness of remorse. Love the healer, the transformer, this the lovers of Verona found. This likewise Faust is to find, when the passions are cooler and clearer, and the depths of human nature more profound.

And the destruction follows swiftly. The assignation, the death of Margaret's mother, the death of Valentine, Margaret's brother—what a magnificent boy he is and how proud of his sister and justly resentful of her fate. How villainously Mephistopheles foils him—the irony of this scene and the triumph of injustice; the flight of Faust and the abandonment of the girl in distress. It is bitterness piled upon bitterness, and the theme is discovered in the beautiful spinning song.

*"Mein Ruh ist hin,  
Mein Herz ist schwer,  
Ich finde sie nimmer,  
Und nimmermehr."*



This is almost untranslatable. And after comes the foreboding chant in the church—the terrible *Day of Wrath*.

*"Dies irae, dies illa  
Solvat saeculum in favilla. . . .  
Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?  
Quem patronum rogaturus?  
Cum vix justus sit securus."*

Poor Margaret!

Why, when these realistic scenes have been managed so well, have we the phantasmagoria of the *Walpurgisnacht*? And above all why the Intermezzo of the *Walpurgis Night's Dream*, which seems introduced only that Goethe may give us a series of brilliant *Xenien* or proverbs? The second question I resign to Goethe specialists who claim to know his mind. The first is reasonably clear. After Margaret Faust must be diverted. And in the sweeping panorama of this witch's vanity fair, a thing that medieval Germany loved, we have the panorama of the irrelevance of life, with its distractions, each represented by one variety of allegorical figure, but all to Faust hideous. Mephistopheles, the spirit of empty, cynical denial, alone is at home here, for the figures are all empty; like life without an aim. To Faust the scene is revolting. For only a moment he toys with lust, as he dances with the fair witch. But as they dance a red mouse pops from her mouth, a strange parody of the romantic kiss, and Faust will have no more of it. Love may not be purchased at this price, nor peace.

He catches a vision of Margaret, now in prison for child murder. To his remorseful pleading for her rescue, Mephistopheles replies coolly: "Wilt fly, and art not proof against dizziness?" The rescue fails. Margaret is too

far gone in her anguish to follow him, and she dies, as the devil pronounces the sentence, "She is judged." But a heavenly voice replies, "She is saved." She is the innocent victim. But Faust, tortured by remorse has now touched the depths:

"Man's concentrated woes o'erwhelm me here."

He had asked to taste the "grimmiest of pain". He has it. So ends *Part I*.

But to Goethe the story is not yet complete. Pain is a part, and a necessary part of experience. Without it no life is complete, even though pain be but the sign of the working of the devil. Now comes *Part II* and the reconstruction of a life that so far has been purely destructive. But because this process is enormously more complex, and because he wrote it in the latter part of his life when the love of allegory had fastened itself on him, this part of the poem is far more difficult to read, and always crowded with Goethe's best oracular wisdom. It is rather more apocalyptic with Pythian utterances than a drama; for scenes it wanders over the cosmic universe, and for characters plunders fancy and mythology.

The story begins many years later—Goethe explained that Faust was one hundred years old when he died. Remorse has prostrated him for a time, but gradually nature and the beneficent powers restore his self-possession. Now he needs and craves the society of men and constructive work. A return to nature is good enough for a season, but Faust, unlike Wordsworth or Rousseau, will not find salvation in the woods and fields and the huts where poor men lie. Goethe has none of the romantic distrust of society, far from it; man comes to himself only in working for and with men. It is only there that can come again the in-

spiration he caught in the magic mirror of youth, but this time he is alert and prepared for its hard adventure. So he turns to the severest work available, the emperor's court that has been allowed by a weak administration to abound with all evils. There he becomes financier and entertainer, restorer of the nation's credit and power and caterer to its aesthetic education—a parallel in part to Goethe's own activity at the little court of Weimar. Faust fails wretchedly in his efforts to reform society, for he has an unregenerate and thankless crew to work with; but the work brings him self-knowledge; and the vision of poetry he catches as entertainer finally saves his soul.

It is possible here to touch only the critical points in the story, and smooth the wrinkles of the more obvious allegory. By a jesting court he is asked to call back to life for a moment the figures of Paris and Helena who were the inspiration of the best of ancient art. It was a jest to the unthinking, but to Faust a moment of critical terror. He must go to the "Mothers", the fount of all inspiration and creative power, and with the clue thus gained recall to the ruder Middle Ages the glory that was Greece. But the hero made the adventure, and though the audience could criticize, Faust, before the beauty of Helena, the best of the art of Ancient Greece, falls in a dead faint. It was his first vision again before his eyes.

"Vanish from me of life the breathing power,  
 If, e'en in thought, I e'er from thee decline!—  
 The gracious form that raptured once my sight,  
 That in the magic mirror waked delight,  
 Was a foam-image to such charms as thine!—  
 'Tis thou, to whom as tribute now I bring  
 My passion's depth, of every power the spring,  
 Love, adoration, madness, heart and soul! . . . . .

Saved, she is doubly mine! I'll dare it! Hear,  
Ye Mothers, Mothers, hear, and grant my quest!  
Who once hath known, without her cannot rest!"

Now follows the long search, aided by all forms of allegorical power, to realize his dreams. It is the classical *Walpurgisnacht* and the scene laid in Greece, with figures from ancient mythology. At first the scene is as disorderly and as irrational as its northern counterpart in *Part I*, but gradually order evolves as the search continues, and the figures become more and more beautiful as art and the poet's creative power in *Faust* are strengthened. It is arduous. Even Mephistopheles, new as he is to this world—for there was no devil in Greece—is hard put to it, until he discovers his nearest friends, first in the grotesque and eternal Sphinxes—but these have a touch of beauty, for their faces and busts are those of beautiful women—and last in the Phorkyads, the three old Grey Women, fearful in aspect, with but one tooth and one eye between them. With these Mephistopheles becomes a daughter of Phorkyas, the nearest of kin to the spirit of denial the Greek mythology afforded—a sinister and allegorical fall from the dapper man of the world in *Part I*. He has lost most of his power, and all of his self-assurance. Again the allegory is plain.

Faust meets Helena—it is the union of the medieval and barbarous, but energetic North, and the creative beauty of the South. This time there is the calm peace of perfect achievement. It is no longer the rush of passion of disorderly and romantic youth, but the calm self-possession of mature age, the reflecting passion of one who knows that by it his powers are being called into richest activity. It is a mutual love where both give and both receive:

"FAUST: What now remaineth, save myself to yield,  
And all I fancied mine, to thy sole sway?  
Freely and truly, let me at thy feet,  
Acknowledge thee as queen, who, coming here,  
Hath won forthwith possession and a throne.

HELENA: I feel myself so distant, yet so near,  
And all too gladly say: Here am I! here!

FAUST: I tremble; scarcely breathe, words die away:  
A dream it is, vanished have place and day!"

But the world is not yet ready for the perfect beauty of such a union. The child Euphorion born of the mating is too unruly—he is the new poetry of the romantic age, beautiful but wayward—and he falls a victim to his own aspiration. As he goes he calls to his mother:

"Leave me in realms forlorn,  
Mother, not all alone!"

And to this request Helena responds:

"HELENA: An ancient word, alas, approves itself in me:  
(to FAUST) That joy and beauty ne'er enduringly are linked!  
Rent is the bond of life, with it the bond of love;  
Lamenting both, I say a sorrowful farewell,  
And throw myself once more, once only, in thine arms.  
Persephoneia, take the boy, take also me!"

Faust again is left alone. But he has her veil; life has given him its richest meaning. Henceforth it must be creative work, in the name of creative beauty, that must direct his steps. He is a man fully equipped, not disconsolate over the loss, as before, but rich in its memory. So he turns again to the world's activity with a man's resolution and a poet's knowledge and ideals. Back to the unworthy emperor; but states and policies are such that not even he can

reform them. It is the poet Goethe himself that is speaking. A more private work, which he can direct alone, responsible only to himself, is all that he can hope for: if there are souls to be saved, he will at least save his own when the rest prove unworthy or unwilling. His wisdom for this world is secure; for even the hugest of terrors now no longer daunt him, Want, Blame, Care, Need. They will creep in and destroy, but not the peace of mind or the activity of the hero.

"FAUST: I have but hurried through the world, I own.  
I by the hair each pleasure seized;  
Relinquished what no longer pleased,  
That which escaped me I let go,  
I've craved, accomplished, and then craved again;  
Thus through my life I've storm'd—with might and  
main,  
Grandly, with power, at first; but now indeed,  
It goes more cautiously, with wiser heed.  
I know enough of earth, enough of men . . .  
In joy or torment ever onward stride,  
Though every moment still unsatisfied!"

His life is accomplished. He has gained not satisfaction, that is for him impossible, but the knowledge where satisfaction can be achieved, and that is in eternity. Only when perfection has been achieved in a world that is progressing by infinite stages toward it, can all man's wants be fully met. This is Goethe's science, it is also his religion. Then only can he say to the passing moment "Ah stay, thou art so fair." Only in that moment when he shall behold life perfect, with people all happy and perfect, working for their happiness the while, only then will life's richest longing be satisfied. But in anticipation he catches the poet's gleam of the future—and he dies. He dies saved because he could

not cease from being Faust, the incurable idealist and yet the practical humanist. His last labors are for himself and for humanity—not impractical labor in attempting to reform impossible constitutions and acting as daysman to inept monarchs, but in the lesser toil of rescuing from want and making the earth more habitable for those in need. Faust wins his wager. It is the regenerative and creative powers of art that have saved him. The poem closes, again with an apocalyptic vision of the redeemed. But it is, not as with Milton an ethical redemption, nor as with Dante a theological, but one peculiarly Goethian, an aesthetic.

The universe, like man's life, is a creative process, moving ceaselessly under laws of its own making, toward perfection. And the laws of the world of planets and atoms, like the laws of man's better nature, are art. To Goethe art and evolution are nearly synonymous. And it was because he lived in accordance with the cosmic formula, that he was saved. "A good man of the right path is conscious still."

Who then is Mephistopheles, this creature exceedingly wise, and yet somehow, we become convinced, wrong in his purpose and right in the final result? "Part of that power not understood, that always wills the bad and works the good." Perhaps it is as near a satisfactory answer to say that he is the denial of this endless process of creation, the effort of the static present to arrest the dynamic future. His theme is so to entangle Faust in the present as to have him lose the ineffable longing that is the urge to creative effort. This to Goethe is sin—to deny the bond that unites man and cosmic nature, man's highest birthright. "Like the star, without haste, without rest." This should be man's motto for the good life. The motto of the devil is rest, and annihilation. He is not hated by God, for he

works God's very purpose; for to create the next, the passing moment must be annihilated.

"I ne'er have cherished hate for thee.  
 Ever too prone is man activity to shirk,  
 In unconditioned rest he fain would live;  
 Hence this companion purposely I give,  
 Who stirs, excites, and must, as devil, work!"

Each of us has, or should have, a Mephistopheles. For as the present gives way to the future, it must in the process suffer destruction. But Mephistopheles would annihilate also the future; his inability to do so is his tragedy.

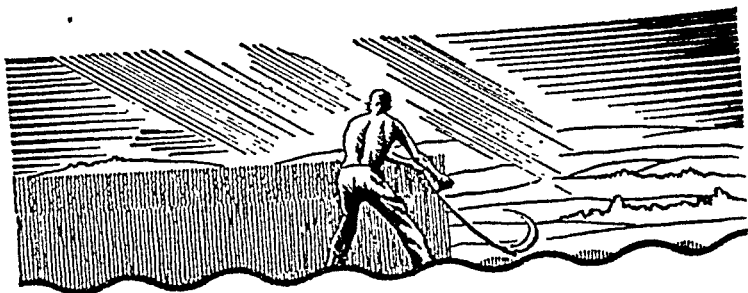
"Why past?  
 Past and pure nothingness are one, I trow.  
 Of what avail creation's ceaseless play?  
 Created things forthwith to sweep away?  
 'There, now 'tis past.'—'Tis past, what may it mean?  
 It is as good as if it ne'er had been,  
 And yet as if it Being did possess,  
 Still in a circle it doth ceaseless press:  
 I should prefer the Eternal—Emptiness."

If *Faust* is a tragedy, it is that of the Devil!

*Faust* is Goethe's last answer to the Romantic School who would drive a wedge between poetry and the active life of man in society, and it is final. In *Part I* it is the romantic idealist, Faust, in his ways a brother to Goetz and Werther, and as such Goethe in his youth had conceived him. His demands were as incapable of fulfilment as those of Goetz or Werther—and he was to be none the less tragic, though his longings may be called more admirable. As such he is the allegory of the Romantic Movement, quivering ever in the torture of unfulfilled hope. In *Part II* by means of wise experience, "high resolve and resolute



action," and art, this fever is gradually cooled, and the energy released, from futile gestures, to wise effort and finally crowning success. The late Faust, is Faust the self-forgetful, Faust the humanitarian, Faust the true artist. Life well lived is an unstable equilibrium, between the ever growing need of the individual and the ever developing constitution of society. It takes one with the fine sense of the true artist to maintain this delicate poise.



## XVI. LAST ISSUES

"How hideous beside beauty showeth hideousness!  
How foolish by discretion's side shows foolishness!"

GOETHE.

There is a passage in Plato's *Republic* that has been quoted so often that it has now some of the assurance of Scripture. Something of the same promise was made by another to his disciples about mansions and treasures not of this earth.

"In heaven there is laid up a pattern of such a city, and he who desires may behold this, and beholding govern himself accordingly. But whether there really is or ever will be such an one is of no importance to him; for he will act according to the laws of that city and of no other."

As one contemplates the rich treasures of the mind laid up in the great tradition of literature, and sees its thread of gold weave the pattern of life, never the same, and yet never a break with the past; as one contrasts this with the far slower attainment in wisdom and manners, one wonders if the labors of poet and prophet were worth their devotion; but one wonders still more what the world would have been without their dream. A humdrum world about us, changed only superficially since the days of Homer, wars more devastating, intrigues far more sinister, rivalries more polite but no less deadly, lives less circumscribed in space and time but no less petty, and the main issue to-day much as it was

then. Goethe has given us the phrase: "Feed and clothe ourselves, rear children, feed them, as well as we may, this is a people's struggle and cry."

Against this drab background the poet, the novelist, the essayist, have drawn the golden pattern, as the vision of life came to them, of a richer humanity, not idealized, but purged of the commonplace, not foreign, but in whose lineaments we may read also ourselves. These are the city, the mansions, the treasures laid up, that man may better come to know himself and the meaning of life. Without them we should hardly take thought to know ourselves, much less to rescue our minds from the petty routine that seems so enthralling. If these have not had the potency to change the world we live in and fashion it to the heart's desire, at least, as Plato has said, they have given other regions where the mind may go to receive refreshment and inspiration. It would go hard with us were we compelled forever to think of humanity in the terms of every day life; but it would go harder were the wisdom of poet and thinker of no consistency with the life of the present or without a clue to its meaning.

This great tradition, this thread of gold that makes a single pattern of the past and the present, may well be called humanism, that essence of urbanity and reason, as Sainte-Beuve calls it, that sees human nature in its largest and richest aspects, and would assign to each of the human faculties its rightful place. It is the question of the good life and a practical philosophy. From the days of Homer to Goethe these poets of a purged humanity have demanded that the human life, if it be well lived, shall reveal a reasonable motive. And if it be poorly lived, an equal insistence on an intelligible reason why. Their attitudes toward life have been different; there have been those to whom life is

all serious, and its discrepancies tragic; there have been those who have laughed at the vanity of humanity striving to transcend its limitations; and there have been those who in disillusionment have sat apart to study coldly the motives of human action, and to make the record fit the facts; but one and all these men have studied life, and brought to its examination the standard of human reason. And their studies have been valuable so far as they have left no aspect of human nature neglected.

It is perhaps a mournful fact that nearly all great literature has striven to read the riddle of human frailty and disillusionment. From Homer to *Faust* it is the story of human failure to achieve the impossible; and even Dante the incorrigible optimist of the Middle Ages, when he passes from Hell to Heaven, abandons humanity in the fires of Purgatory. In Heaven he is with the blessed only who have bathed in Lethe and Eunoë and lost the memory of the conflict of life; the victory comes only in the blessed vision. But it is this vision that never escapes great literature, for though the record be one of tragic failure or comic grotesqueness, it is only by the worth of the vision that the tragedy or comedy discovers its meaning. There could be no such word as failure, were there no ideal of success, however impossible; there could be no tragedy were there no ideal of cosmic justice, or no comedy were there not somewhere laid up in heaven the idea of good manners. So the bitterness of the satirist, the cold aloofness of the cynic, the passionate resentment of tragedy, are a vindication of the idea of a perfect or perfectible humanity—a Platonic vision perhaps, but terribly compelling—to those that must lead narrow and drab lives.

It is one of those miracles, like the creation of life, that at the beginning of the European tradition, even before

European history, the torch should have been lighted by a genius in human nature like Homer. That in a heroic poem like the *Iliad*, a story of battle and intrigue, no different in its plot from a thousand far-off forgotten things, should emerge the fullest portrayal of human nature. In it are both tragedy and comedy, pathos and cynicism, the enthusiasm of richly endowed youth, and the weathered wisdom of age, the softness and beauty of woman, and the hardness of unthwarted revenge—it is easy to abound in paradoxes when speaking of this poet, for Homer is a paradox still greater. Compare him with the other poets that have come at the beginnings of other literatures, and here we have a summary, not of all that constitutes a man, but of all that enters into the complexity of a rich society. There is a downright simplicity about the others, that may, as in the *Beowulf*, rise to stark grandeur, or a heroic quality of resolution, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, that strikes into admiration. But here is the epitome of human life and nature lived in the large, and lived beautifully, and thoughtfully, with the desire to read into its complexity something of a moral purpose.

Homer's was an age that took life gladly as a glorious adventure worth the living, and yet as a thoughtful thing too, far from the glad enthusiasm of naïve childhood. The Greek dramatists that followed were his children and heirs, carefully cultivating the fields that he had broken. For without Homer there could have been no Greek tragedy. Each takes his hint from the parent and tilling with more assiduous care brings a larger harvest. And Plato and Socrates who follow, as naturally take their attitudes toward life from the same great source. Their first concern is not to soar into the realms of the abstract, but to detect in the human drama intelligible motives for the acts and scenes,

and to discover the secret of the good life without denying any of its ingredients.

Aeschylus is the greatest optimist that ever lived in great literature. Living in an age of huge undertakings, and huge success, he saw the story of human nature as a magnificent undertaking that for its perfect success needed only an intelligible conscience and social institutions. Almost as trustful as Rousseau—but in a quite different manner—he thought of human nature and human society in terms of achievable perfectibility, and the process of education as wholly reasonable. To Sophocles, who was greater, and perhaps nearer to the master, there are situations in life that are beyond the ability of reason to explore. Oedipus and Antigone are the victims, not of lack of reason only, but of that curious thing the moral conscience, bound up with reason, but at times speaking with a vehemence that quite drowns the quieter voice. Such were the situations of Oedipus, aghast at his impiety, and Achilles, bitterly disillusioned by the emptiness of his revenge. How shall the voices of reason and conscience, these two guides to life, be reconciled? Euripides, fired by the new science, looks for reason, not in social institutions and law, as Aeschylus, but in the heart of well-ordered personality itself. He is nearest to the Greek philosopher and had listened to the pleadings of Socrates. And his tragedies are the commentary on lives gone astray to destruction, by the loss of that balance of faculties, that perfect adjustment, that he too would have called the good life. In his way, too, Euripides was an optimist; yet I doubt if he would have called himself one. Though his Medea and his Hippolytus may lack that perfect self-control, yet the power is still attainable; to deny it is to deny the reasonableness of human nature.

But a period of optimistic faith in human nature is al-

ways followed by a valley of disillusionment and depression. Such is the story of all human achievement, and such is yet more the story of its tradition in literature. Euripides was full of doubt; there is little but doubt left in the later comedies of Aristophanes. The choruses of Euripides are frankly skeptical about the ultimate justice of the gods, and of their interest in the affairs of men; Aristophanes on more than one occasion makes open fun of his gods, and finds human nature hopelessly irrelevant and trivial; and under the mask of his rollicking mirth there is a set earnestness as he plies the scourge in the hope that, if humanity cannot be reformed in nature, it may at least be driven by ridicule into a semblance of honest manners. He is a caustic drill sergeant of raw and disorderly Athens.

It is these ages of reflection that are the opportunity for the philosopher, for philosophy, in the Greek sense of the word, thrives upon a diet of disillusion and pessimism. It is a sort of ark in which the wise may ride out in safety the deluge of unrest and unbelief; and Socrates was the Greek Noah. If you cannot reform the world, at least you can save your own soul and the souls of those who like you are willing to accept its discipline. With Greek philosophy, as with the Greek city in the same era, came the end of the collectivism of the Greek state. From now on to its glorious end in the Stoicism of such as Marcus Aurelius, the ideal of the philosopher will be the regeneration of the individual. It is little wonder that when Christianity came, with its large faith in human perfectibility, it chose for its ethics the austere moral philosophy of the later Greeks, and that it nearly succeeded in making a saint out of Socrates and canonized Augustine the close student of Plato. The story of Greek philosophy more and more becomes the effort to discover for the fortunate few, who can take it, the dis-

cipline for the good life that reason alone can give. But, and it is a mournful story, the more conscious this discipline becomes, the less spontaneous will be the spirit of literature. The literature of ancient Greece declined in the general flood which only philosophy rode out in safety.

In the meanwhile in Rome a new experiment was being tried, first in the aggressive city state, and finally in world empire. The very Roman consciousness of a mission in life larger than the individual, and larger than the city, gave to Roman thought an austerity that sees itself best in laws and social institutions. If ever a people was born to rule, and passed the tradition on unbroken, it was the leading families of Rome and those that came under their influence. They were bred to it with the same intensity that disciplined the Roman legion into the finest fighting machine the world had ever known; and the moral of it was reasonable coöperation. Rome produced a literature, most of it frankly an imitation of the Greek, and then only when the establishment of the traditions of government was secure and people had a trifle of leisure to give to the lighter and less manly exercises. For the genuine Roman always had a huge contempt for the softer graces of an art that never dreamed of practical advantages.

But the spirit of Rome gave the world Virgil, its supreme poet, again in a day when a new enthusiasm seemed to promise a golden age to the Eternal City. It is the Roman speaking of the glory that is Rome, and the responsibility and the peace and plenty for a world now won for its empire. There was every reason for the new enthusiasm, and there was every reason also for the *Aeneid* to be, as the poet planned it, a mingling of a battle cry and the *Te Deum*. But the world was not young as it had been in the days of Homer, the enthusiasm was only the momentary glamor



that often comes late in autumn. Splendid as it was, the Roman world and its great institutions rested upon a foundation of crushed hopes and disillusionment. Can peace come to the human soul, and a satisfaction to its longings, if life no longer holds out the lure of adventure? And there comes a time in life when the savor of adventure is lacking, and a glorious cruise like that of Aeneas becomes an unpleasant routine. Aeneas, Virgil, Augustus, Rome were all hopelessly past middle age. Even the tragedy of Dido, though it can bring the flutter of longing to the hero's heart, cannot divert him from his purpose. The seeds of the pessimism that had been sown in Greece had their harvest also in Rome and in Virgil. Even Horace, cheerful optimist as he seems, has substituted urbanity and good manners for the passionate search for the reasonable pattern in human life. He declined the battle, crowned his head with myrtle, and sang bewitchingly to forget.

A new spirit was needed, not to correct, but by conflict to give new vigor and a new meaning to the tradition. Curiously this came from the East. It was like the visit of the Wise Men who had seen the star. They brought gifts, some valuable, some necessary as an irritant. In the later days of the Roman Empire, it is safe to say that the prevailing thought was more oriental than Greek. It is certainly true that Christianity, as it first swept the world, was oriental not only in origin, but also in its antipathy to the genius of Greece.

Greece was objective, rational, human; the Orient is introspective, mystical, romantic, ecstatic. With these last traits Christianity combined the stern theological ethics of the Jew and his distrust of the human reason. It was a curious combination, but it worked admirably in the days of doubt and disillusionment, when faith in human nature

was dead and humanism had all but disappeared. For its literature Christianity had the Jewish scriptures; for its compelling motive a belief in a mystical and glorious hereafter that was oriental in its contempt for the meaninglessness of this life; and for its Achilles and Ulysses the stories of its saints and martyrs. But this lack of interest in this life, and of an insistent desire to see it objectively, or to judge it on the grounds of human reason—to see it as a comedy or a tragedy—this to the early Christian was an anticipation of Heaven. A people to whom a martyrdom was a crowning vindication of a life well spent and a sure road to sainthood—well, to the Greek humanist this was to set things on their heads, a folly unspeakable, a denial final and complete of all that reason finds acceptable. The philosopher could understand a dignified escape from an impossible world through suicide; but ecstatically to go to the stake, and to call torture a victory—it was humanly impossible. The vision had blinded the imagination to objective reality.

A new synthesis was needed to bring some equilibrium. This world of war and business and love cannot allow itself to be looked upon as utterly unconcerned with the good life, or as only a bait to tempt the unwary. It took thirteen hundred years to do it—a long period of gestation, for the materials were paradoxical. But to defend itself against heresies, to strengthen its faith by objective symbols, the church was compelled to create a dogma. Its mysteries, though emotionally potent, had to be clothed in language that could be communicated and defended against misuse or error; and the only appeal was to the once much despised reason. So came Dante, the most logical of poets, and yet the most ecstatic, the most spiritual and yet austere objectively. Plato would have understood Dante. He would

have seen that the Hell was but another name for the turning of one's back on the good life as the humanist tried to live it in reason. He would have understood fully the idea of discipline in Purgatory. He might, however, have had some difficulty with the reaches of Heaven; yet even Plato had his visions.

However that be, Dante brought back to Europe the long buried tradition, and strove, with a degree of success never achieved since, to unite it with the ecstatic orientalism of Christianity. He, and those who had silently been working before him, made of this faith transplanted from the East, a thing now reasonably adapted to the more downrightly objective West. Dante is justly, as Homer for the ancient world, the definer of a tradition, and the beginning of many things.

But in many respects Dante stands alone—as lonely a figure in literature as he was in life. His was a gigantic problem and the ages that followed him were less and less interested in the more spiritual phases of his thought. Though he saw the things of this life clearly enough, in the tradition of the West, he nevertheless tried to read into them the allegory of things eternal and unseen. To him still the world of final truth is the spiritual world beyond the realm of the senses and the pedestrian human reason, and discernible only in the rapt moments of vision. He tried to reconcile the transcendental and the real, and give to both a human significance. It is the single largest effort ever made by any poet, perhaps the crowning effort of poetry—to bring the whole scope of the universe, seen and unseen, into one single experience and to give it a name. In this respect the *Divine Comedy* is without peer. It is the synthesis of all human science, divine revelation, human aspiration perhaps is a better term, and a revelation

of human character and potentiality in all of its manifold phases. It deserves well to stand alone.

After Dante came the discovery of the marvelous complexity of this human world and its irrelevant place in the total cosmic universe—a paradox again. An infinitely complex and varied world this one we live in; and most of it quite unknown and much of it perhaps unknowable; and on the other hand the utter discrepancy between it and the universe of which it is such an insignificant part. In the face of this Dante's effort to write all nature and human nature and God into one poem seemed a sacrilege on the part of weak and irresponsible reason. Man becomes in this endeavor something of a usurper—"He wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in." So modesty becomes the order of the day, and the study of man and man's world the prevailing interest—a less ambitious humanism, but perfectly logical though disillusioned. It is again the reaction against the age of a larger faith, an effort to put mystery where it belongs, in the world of the unknowable, and a resolute desire to explore and reduce to order the knowable. Literature has again made the great refusal.

The story here is easy to follow. Cervantes and Shakespeare begin again the close study of human character and motives and the evolution of human personality, and Montaigne as the new Socrates makes records for a new theory of human values. How much alike and yet how different are these great contemporaries—there had been nothing like them since the days of Greece when in a single lifetime there had come great tragic and comic poets and a great philosopher. Only then the great had been neighbors and perhaps friends. Now they have all Europe for their home and three languages to speak in. Cervantes,

though he sees life as a comic interlude, is the most kindly. Though his break with the past was a humorous protest against its unreasonable ideals and practice, in his burlesque of these ideals he finds much of the lovable and heroic in frail humanity. Though ideals may in a practical world be utterly foolish, and their followers like Don Quixote whimsical farces, yet there is about them something holy—sanctified falsehoods—that makes for greatness and admiration in character. You may speak disrespectfully of them, but not too disrespectfully—they have a place in the cosmic order of things.

Montaigne, like Shakespeare, begins with no illusions. Reason is only a practical guide in the affairs of this world and the only protection against disaster. To be reasonable is to be objective, to study human nature to know the attainable, and to content oneself within its limits. To act the god and demand a throne is to make of oneself a comic or a tragic fool; and he has no taste to play such a part for the edification of his contemporaries. The good life thus is a . . . manners, inner and outer, that shall provide for . . . cies, take into consideration all man's personal . . . have a philosophy that will teach him how "w . . . well to die". To ask more than this is to a . . . ble and invite the lightning. Montaigne is mc . . . sees the pitiful discrepancy between the . . . and the world beyond to which he has is ironical for he sees that few content h the attainable, but most continue to . . . rightful claimants of the throne. . . goes yet farther. Like Montaigne . . . of man, how pitifully weak he is, . . . le forces, but like Euripides . . . o the maliciousness of the

world beyond man's knowledge and of the unsuspected human heart. Even wisdom may not, as in *Hamlet*, discover a way of escape. As in the *Tempest*, human wisdom lies between forces that it can only partly understand and control; the sinister, like Caliban, that only dexterity can evade, and the benevolent, like Ariel, always restive and incalculable. The irony is the inadequacy of even the best foresight, and the irrelevance or downright malignity of a fate that uncovers human situations. Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Antony, each in a situation where by all the laws of reason and logic he should be impregnable, suddenly discover its utter inadequacy. Reason, precedent, philosophy at the last resort fail them. It is not as in Greek tragedy where some manifest flaw, like passion, suddenly drives them to an end unforeseen, but nature and reason itself become hangmen over night. The relativity of reason, the human significance of morals, the compensating greatness of personality, these are the things that Shakespeare discovers. He is the greatest realist.

The seventeenth century in France was modest—perhaps the most modest period of great literature. Within the limits it assigned itself it did admirably, perfectly; but it never ventured as did Shakespeare to see human nature in the large or to contemplate the human situation in its most ironical gesture. It is urbane and utterly reasonable, seeing tragedy and comedy as the lack of the qualities and manners that should distinguish the gentleman. Nothing too much, the motto of Aristotle, becomes for it the highest of wisdom; and because only hard discipline and the company of the disciplined can make the gentleman, it became a courtly literature, dreading the uncouth, because it is unreasonable, dreading also the unrestrained imagination because it may lead to extravagance.

Milton, too, is looking for a rational discipline for human nature, but with a far different motive. To him, as to Shakespeare, human nature is untrustworthy and man lives in an inhospitable world. But Milton has the introspection of the Puritan, and the willingness also of the Puritan to wage a righteous warfare against the powers of darkness. But it is an internal warfare, this, and its prize human freedom, perfection of character, that alone will make life worth the living and justify the ways of man to God, if not of God to man. It is a ceaseless war of reason and right living against unreason and appetite. Almost we may fancy in the austerity of this man that we are back again by the side of Dante in the Middle Ages. But while Dante catches the glimpse of the Face eternal, Milton sees only, but in perfect clarity, the face of Satan, its fascination and terror. God to Milton is a force in aid, but internal, the power that would make for righteousness in man, and its sign perfection of character; this alone is the achievement of freedom. Milton again, like Dante, is a lonely soul. He sought to discover a higher synthesis between the ways of man and the eternal. Aeschylus tried it once, in the *Prometheus*, Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, now this Englishman again makes the effort in the *Paradise Lost*.

The large trust in the human reason, and the corresponding fear of emotion and imagination as *ignes fatui*, will o' the wisps, that lead into temptation, this confidence and dread that distinguishes the new classicism, was certain to breed its opposite; and it came with a rush in the romantic spirit of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In some respects we are yet living the after effects of the Age of Reason. It was Rousseau who first gave the new spirit a clear direction, but he had a multitude who followed, each cleaving a different course, until now the terms ro-

mantic and romanticism have a connotation so vague that it is madness to try to define them. All agree in at least one point; the exaltation of the imagination, and the preference of its swift perception of truth to the slower and more pedestrian processes of reason. It, rather than reason, is what furnishes life with its values; from it alone may one be assured of the essence of personality itself and the large and more generous issues to which personality is devoted. There is more than a little shot of the Orient in this draught. It was the German who best cultivated this new region and gave the new age its most consistent philosophy; and it was Goethe, who, though no romanticist himself, would have been impossible in any other age, and who comes nearest of all to expressing the most vital things the new age was trying to say.

At the same time by the end of the century man's novel diversion, natural science, which had also its rebirth with the Renaissance, had begun to discover for itself a new motive and a philosophy all its own. In its origins, of course, as in most things, this goes back to Greece; and the Roman poet Lucretius, more Greek than Roman, but yet the greatest of the Romans, finds a natural law that runs inexorably through all things, man and nature, binding all in one vast system of dynamic necessity. In a way Dante too had glimpsed the processes of nature as one inexorable whole radiating from its source, the spiritual throne of God. But now the new physics and chemistry, the new—very new—biology, had gone farther than philosophical speculation, into mathematical and physical demonstration. And all nature came slowly to be marshalling itself under humanly discoverable law. The loop-hole for human freedom began to contract, until in this new age, it was Kant who found it discoverable only in the higher



reason, that thing so despised in the former age. The stone the builders had rejected now of a verity became the corner of all philosophy and poetry.

Goethe was also something of a biological scientist as well as man of affairs and poet. His view of life will be practical, as that of a man of the world, full of objective study, as befits a scientist, and fired by this new imagination because he was a son of his age. His science was biology, and in it the new word evolution was being thrillingly repeated. Life, the history of man, the history of the stars, of all cosmic nature, is a gigantic emergence and process toward some infinite goal. Nature is one, human and material, physical and spiritual, atoms and star dust, moving majestically toward some end not yet revealed, an infinite perfection, whose nature is neither matter nor spirit but both. Science with its observation and laws can catch glimpses of the past and the present, can see whence we have come and some of the steps by the way; but the science of sciences, which shall grasp all things and hold them to be studied, past, present, and future, such a science as will be able to read the riddle of the universe, this has not yet been born.

So Goethe in his poetry and his greater prose strives, once more in the history of the tradition, at a synthesis, a study of man as part of the process of nature itself. These strivings of the human spirit, these Faust longings for infinite knowledge, this desire to sit on the throne of God, though man lack eternity and a throne, are not, as by Montaigne, to be condemned, but are a sign of that infinite longing after perfection through evolution that runs through all nature. Man is not to be damned for his pride, for it is this spiritual unrest that is the secret of his true life. It and it alone will give him the true activity that leads

to his salvation. Here is a curious reversal of values: the irony of a Don Quixote or a Montaigne becomes with this poet the motive for salvation. The worm longs to be a butterfly; it is his nature, as Faust longs for the unknowable. But in this longing and effort man must, like the worm, remember also his limitations and confine his activities to the attainable. There is yet a strange residue of the practical Montaigne in Goethe the practical man of affairs; but it is also this which unites Goethe to the great tradition.

The synthesis between science, as Goethe saw science, and human nature, this is the latest great synthesis tried in the history of the great tradition. In some ways we have not yet transcended Goethe, though his science now looks pitifully inadequate, and his optimism has acquired a tarnish. But the nineteenth century and this quarter of the twentieth show no one to put beside him. Goethe is not the end of the tradition, but in these days of increasing complexity and of re-definitions, and fresh disillusionments, the time seems to be ripening for some new large effort to define values.

What is the story of the past hundred years since the death of Goethe? It tells in the main only a long tale of disillusionment after disillusionment, of abandoned temples and deities shorn of respect. There have been some magnificent experiments, only later to be abandoned. There have been magnificent technicians. There is a new literary type, the novel, born with Cervantes, now showing quite unsuspected powers. On the other hand poetry which even a hundred years ago admitted no rivals finds itself terribly down at the heels. Perhaps, at the risk of a generalization—and all I am doing here is to generalize—

I should say that this is the day of the journalist, the recorder—only we have not yet uncovered a Montaigne.

A new series of disillusionments. Perhaps the greatest has been the latest—we have lost our magnificent trust of a few years ago in science, the belief that science was to penetrate into every field of human activity, lay all things straight, and by its magic aid the world of human affairs was to be made a world of angels. As physics and chemistry had come to know the material world, so sociology and its sisters were to know and master the social world. Only give science a chance and what a perfect paradise it would make of the human ant hill. How confident were, and perhaps still are some, the physiologists, biologists, and above all the sociologists. And the psychologist, was it yesterday or the day before that he had discovered the whole secret of human behavior? And to his aid came the physiologists who discovered the secrets of personality in the ductless glands—those mysteries that have dethroned the Fates and made Providence a cold idol. Science made man a curious machine, and his reason merely its smooth or raucous operation, and responsibility to self or heaven a thing that can best be uttered in mathematical formulæ. The thing was and is still a bit depressing. The heir of the ages, made in the image of God, seems rather the son of Henry Ford, and not always or often as nicely adjusted. You cannot write a *Paradise Lost* on this theme. You call in a mechanic. Prose and dreary prose, journalistic prose; and the end is not yet.

But of late years science has been growing far more modest in its claims. No longer does it talk of universal sovereignty or of the heir of the ages; it does not even pretend now to be a means of arriving at ultimate truth or reality. Above all most disillusioning has been its loss of

faith in the thing that the beginning of the nineteenth century heralded as a cosmic evolution toward perfection.

"Striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form."

or

"Yet I doubt not through the ages one enduring purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

All this looks cold comfort to-day after a last night's spree. The worm is worm and man is man, and geology and morphology can tell us no why or whither. And the process of the sun will lead ultimately to a cold and dead universe, a clock run down with no cosmic hand to rewind it in sight.

The old philosopher-poet Lucretius could look on a universe of reasonable law and find comfort in the human reason, that from its majestic tower could contemplate the vast machine and find edification. The modern philosopher-poet, if there be one, would seem to have discovered that there is as much unreason as reason in the enterprise of running a universe and a vast amount of inefficiency, and that in the end like as not the unreason will prevail. He may be able, and certainly would be willing, to give God advice; for who knows he may need it.

The result of these swiftly kaleidoscopic changes in points of view and enthusiasms and depressions—a chart of them like a weather report or fever record would look interesting—has been that our hundred years of literature have been a series of confident promotion schemes and then what looks like betrayals of trust and bankruptcy. We have been looking for safe investments for our money that promised quick and easy returns, and have lost heavily in confidence and in pocket. Yet this is a story that cannot

be told here, for it would take a large book in itself—a story of gradual bewilderment after childish faith. But a very few of the attempts at a synthesis may give a hint of the interest of the story.

One of the strongest of faiths, and most difficult to shatter, has been that if only the reason and science of the sociologist could be made to prevail, a social order could be devised for the glory of man and the curing of all human ailments. Society and the underdog in particular are ill only because the scientific efficiency expert was not called in earlier. Zola in France, badly as he has been painted as a realist down-on-all-fours to smell out human refuse, had really a worthy faith, that if only these evils could be studied by an expert and adequate remedies applied, the sanitary system might be set in order and society be made hygienically safe for the weak and ailing. His was a resolute faith in science as a cure; it implied that society and even human life was determined by discoverable laws; and that it was the business of literature to be both reporter and editorial writer: to report the news and to offer suggestions toward a policy. There have been many Zolas; literature on both sides of the Atlantic has abounded with them, good, pretty little Zolas, and black, wicked ones, but all intent on this journalistic enterprise to make literature the handmaid to enlightened sociology. Until now we have grown somewhat skeptical about wholesale reform through the agency of the efficiency expert. The humanist tradition at least has never regarded reason and the will of God to be synonymous with social legislation and amelioration through external institutions. Even Milton, meliorist as he was, would not go that far; law to him was not equal to the definition of statutes, good as this may be.

Perhaps the largest figure of the nineteenth century was Tolstoi. He was so earnest and so good. What a joy to live in a world of saints like him—or would it be an insufferable bore? Never a man more bountifully convinced that man is a potential angel; never a man who was more distressed by the wickedness of social institutions. Man individually a god in disguise, in society a devil unmasked! A sociological reformer and a theological who would begin by defining God and destroying society. But Tolstoi is not in the tradition. There is in him much persuasive sweetness, but little light. No writer of the century better able to give the moving panorama of life in its essential unreason; no writer who brings less reason to correct the flaw. You cannot solve a problem by erasing it, even if you use the love of God and man as the eraser. So Tolstoi, the grandest figure of the century, is also the loneliest—not like Dante because from a mountain peak he surveys and maps all humanity, but because like the ascetic of the Middle Ages or the Prophet of the Desert, he has made the grand refusal. But he has a sweet and compelling voice.

With the waning of faith in human perfectibility and in the sociological novelist, has come an equal distrust of democracy as a cure for all human ailments. What was once regarded as the motive for regeneration has now come to be seen as a necessary nuisance. How inspiring the glorious hymn to Democracy chanted by that gorgeous optimist Walt Whitman—and how rustily out of date. His faith in the equality of man, equality of races, of the Christ in each human face—our criminologists and psychologists, and psychiatrists have taught us a thing or two since the glad enthusiasms of the Civil War. Whitman is a cruder and more noisy Shelley, an inspiration like Tolstoi, a

prophet perhaps, but also a great false prophet, sometimes, be it said reverently, an inspired idiot, but yet a Don Quixote that one must love.

The nearest to the objective use of science by Goethe in an effort to see the fate of humanity in the laws that move nature, but devoid of all the transcendental mysticism of romanticism, is the genius of Hardy. He is not like Tolstoi, a recorder and a prophet, but rather like Goethe, only better, a recorder who reads into his record the pattern he sees in the world of nature. The same blind, meaningless force that makes atoms cluster in stars, or from the aimless protoplasm evolves the human brain, also discovers itself in the character and institutions of man—a primal urge that the philosopher Bergson has attempted to define, but whose processes no human ingenuity can ever hope to discover.

“Into this Universe, and *Why* not knowing  
Nor *Whence*, like Water willy-nilly flowing:  
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,  
I know not *Whither*, willy-nilly blowing.”

The pressure of an environment on character in *The Return of the Native*, the potency of powers beyond man's control that bring tragedy in the *Dynasts*—things in their particular little or big, but in their massed pressure hopeless to combat or to understand, these are the things that mould the life of men and nations. It is the transfer of a newer definition of evolution, less genial by far, to human life and institutions. Perhaps Hardy next to Tolstoi is the largest figure in these hundred years, and the most significant.

There are those in these last years who have essayed the rôle of experimental psychologist in literature, and used

the novel as the record of their significant observations. Some have been men of penetrating power who have microscopically examined the subtle flow of temperament, and the checks and spillways that we now call character. To these the moral problem is rather a psychological one and all action a sort of release of inner pressures; and to record these is a far more fascinating study and a more valuable one for understanding humanity than the old speculations about morals or character. You can't call a man good or bad, except in a relative, conventional way; what he is really is a series of mental and physiological adjustments or maladjustments; and the novelist becomes the lecturing and demonstrating psychiatrist. Each person is a separate problem, and for the old ideas of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven are substituted the more modern and scientific hospitals for incurables, sanatoriums, and the normal world of human society. And here the psychologist and sociologist join hands in banishing into the Limbo of useless luggage the *Iliad*, the *Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*. Oedipus was a paranoiac. Dante had dementia praecox, and Satan an inferiority complex. Where is an easier and more satisfying form of literary criticism and literary craftsmanship?

But the new synthesis when it occurs must take in the whole nature of man, and be as satisfying to his moral nature as it is to his scientific; that is, it must somehow hold out a theory of values for human conduct, and thus rescue what is the most jealously guarded human prerogative—to judge and pronounce whether a thing be good or evil. The new synthesis will be hospitable to science; it may not ignore science and all it has taught of accuracy of observation and of record, of dispassionate pursuit of truth, of tolerance until error is shown by inexorable fact to be error—all



these contributions that science has made will never be forgotten. But it will have some of the modesty also that the new science, unexpectedly perhaps, but nevertheless wholesomely, has discovered. There are limitations to the world of science which science to-day is readily coming to recognize. Science may tell to a nicety the age, and structure, and all the life history of this rocky island, with its wooded hills and bold cliffs, and the deep blue Mediterranean, which I see as I look up from this writing. But science has no word that can reveal the peace of this scene to a soul at rest, or its irony to one in despair. These things are human and above or below the gauge of the recorder or statistician. One may, if one will, psychoanalyze Hamlet, and show Shakespeare's unerring knowledge of human temperament in a day before psychology was born; but the process will not reveal the beauty or the value of the moral character and its significance for life. These are the things that humanism has looked for in the record of literature, a significance and a value far above that of fact, though needing fact to make the record convincing. It is the glory of great literature that it has thus reconciled fact and human values and made of the tradition a veritable romance. The new synthesis will have to do the same thing if it would not break the thread that unites us with the past nor lose the glamor of its romance.

The new effort will as the old strive to discover some place for human freedom. This was the theme of Homer in the beginning, as of Dante, and finally of the optimistic Goethe. It is first and last the greatest tribute to great poetry that in it there is ever the vindication of man's moral nature and the intelligibility of his fate. How to rescue this in the face of the complexity and mechanism of modern life and from the coils of a triumphant science—

this is a task that will challenge the powers of the highest ambition. To say the task is hopeless is to renounce our faith in humanity itself, and to deny the stages by which it has raised itself to its present stature. Man is vindicated by his works, and his greatest and most enduring are in his great tradition.

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## INDEX OF NAMES AND SUBJECTS

This index makes no effort to be more than a practical aid to the reader who wishes without trouble to lay his hands on the various topics raised in the chapters of the book. It does not record every time a title of a book or a name appears in the text, but only when there is some significant issue raised or a comparison suggested.

- ABRAHAM, 224.  
 ACHAEANS, the, 19 et seq.  
 AENEID, see Virgil.  
 AESCHYLUS, 518; and Aristophanes, 115 et seq.; and Sophocles, 91; the man, 69 et seq.; optimism of, 78; his tragic theme, 76 et seq.; the *Agamemnon*, 70 et seq.; its plot, 72 et seq.; the *Choëphoroe*, 73 et seq.; the *Eumenides*, 73 et seq.; the *Prometheus Bound*, 77 et seq.; Clytemnestra and Lady Macbeth, 75.  
 ALEXANDER THE GREAT, 187, 229 et seq.  
 ANTONY, MARK, 133.  
 APOLLONIUS OF TAYANA, 178.  
 AQUINAS, ST. THOMAS, *Summa*, 359.  
 ARABIAN NIGHTS, 151.  
 ARETINO, 312.  
 ARIOSTO, 312.  
 ARISTOPHANES, 157; and Homer, 125 et seq.; the critic of poetry, 115 et seq.; and farce, 112 et seq.; his range, 109 et seq.; the serious, 116 et seq.; on Socrates, 106; the theme of comedy, 123 et seq.; the universality of his laughter, 105 et seq.; the *Acharnians*, 106, 108 et seq.; the *Clouds*, 123; the *Frogs*, 111 et seq.; *Lysistrata*, 6, 110 et seq.; *Plutus*, 117 et seq.  
 ARISTOTLE, 409.  
 AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE, 261 et seq.  
 BEOWULF, 42.  
 BHAGAVAT GITA, THE, 201 et seq.  
 BOCCACCIO, 269.  
 BOËTIE, E. DE LA, *Servitude Volontaire*, 338.  
 BOILEAU, 430.  
 BRADLEY, A. C., *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 385.  
 BRUTUS, 133.  
 BUDDHA, 190 et seq., 252.  
 BUTLER, S., *Hudibras*, 314, 432.  
 CAESAR, JULIUS, 133.  
 CAESAR, AUGUSTUS, *Emperor*, 132 et seq.  
 CALVIN, J., 434.  
 CELESTINA, 311.  
 CERVANTES, 524; his life, 310; and Dante, 333 et seq.; and Shakespeare, 326; the realist, 312 et seq.; *Don Quixote*, allegory in, 327 et seq.; a burlesque, 313 et seq.; the character of the heroes, 318 et seq.; charm of the characters, 328 et seq.; contrast between ideals and reality, 320 et seq.; Dulcinea del Toboso, 321 et seq.; *Don Quixote*, effect of, 324 et seq.; and Hamlet, 334; humor in, 323 et seq.; its novelty, 311 et seq.; Part II, 325; its popularity, 309 et seq.; the theme, 331 et seq.  
 CHATEAUBRIAND, L. R., 361.  
 CHESTERFIELD, LORD, 408.

- CHIVALRY, 265 et seq.
- CHRISTIANITY AND STOICISM, 184 et seq.
- CICERO, on *Friendship*, 346; on *Socrates*, 159.
- CIVIL WAR IN ENGLAND, THE, 434.
- COMEDY, origin of, 106 et seq.; and social manners, 412 et seq.; a social weapon, 427 et seq.
- COMTE, A., 2.
- COPERNICUS, 167.
- CORNEILLE, 407.
- CROMWELL, 434.
- DANIEL, book of, 229 et seq.
- DANTE, 5, 522 et seq.; his life, 271; glimpses of his character in *Divine Comedy*, 280, 289; *Divine Comedy*, its cosmography, 272 et seq.; its difficulties, 270 et seq.; its theme, 272 et seq.; *Hell*, 277, 279 et seq.; 460 et seq.; *Purgatory*, 277, 286; the *Earthly Paradise*, 291 et seq.; *Heaven*, 278, 292 et seq.; *Question Concerning Land and Water*, 358; his allegory in *Divine Comedy*, 276 et seq.; his doctrine of love, 273 et seq.; and the European tradition, 295 et seq.; and the grotesque, 284 et seq.; and the Hebrew, 295; and human nature, 279 et seq.; and the idea of the state, 297 et seq.; on immortality, 58; the lower and the higher sciences, 274 et seq.; and modern science, 275 et seq.; the Oriental, 295; power of vision, 284 et seq.; and science, 296 et seq.; on Socrates, 158; sympathy for human degradation, 282 et seq.; vision of perfect knowledge, 294 et seq.; his search for freedom, 270 et seq.; use of Virgil, 297 et seq.; meaning of Beatrice, 291 et seq.; Satan, 286.
- DAVID, KING, 214, 216, 226 et seq.
- DEMOSTHENES, 220.
- DON QUIXOTE, see Cervantes.
- EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, THE, 466 et seq.
- ELIJAH, 219, 228.
- ELIZABETH, QUEEN, 433.
- ENLIGHTENMENT, THE, 466 et seq.
- EPICTETUS, 180.
- EPICURUS, 156.
- EPICURIANISM, 180.
- EURIPIDES, 157, 519; and Aristophanes, 115 et seq.; and Shakespeare, 99 et seq.; and Sophocles, 93 et seq.; a cynic (?), 99 et seq.; and the heroic, 100 et seq.; his psychological studies, 98 et seq.; the realist, 101 et seq.; his theme, 97 et seq.; the *Alcestis*, 94 et seq.; the *Hippolytus*, 93 et seq.; the *Medea*, 95 et seq.
- EVOLUTION, theory of, 533.
- FAUST, see Goethe; and the Middle Ages, 491.
- FAUSTUS, DOCTOR, 306 et seq.
- FRANCIS, SAINT, 255; *Little Flowers of*, 257 et seq.
- GANDHI, M. K., 204.
- GARROD, H. W., 153.
- GENESIS, 213.
- GENTLEMAN, the, code of, 405 et seq.
- GIBBON, E., *Memoirs*, 342.
- GOETHE, 529 et seq.; his life, 475 et seq.; and Dante, 487; and Milton, 486; and Montaigne, 489; and Racine, 487; his friends, 484 et seq.; the amateur, 476 et seq.; on the *Çakuntala*, 209; influence of woman, 485 et seq.; the lyricist, 482 et seq.; the man of affairs, 482 et seq.; and Science, 483 et seq.; and the *Storm and Stress*, 478; and Weimar, 481 et seq.; the youthful, 477 et seq.; *Faust*, 416, 465, 490 et seq.; its plot, 492 et seq.; its theme, 493 et seq.; the Helena episode, 508 et seq.; Faust and allegory, 495 et seq.; *Faust* and the *Divine Comedy*, 492 et

- seq.; character of Margaret, 502 et seq.; Mephistopheles, 499, 511 et seq.; Mephistopheles and Milton's Satan, 493 et seq.; *Faust*, Part II, 506 et seq.; *Goetz*, 478 et seq.; *Iphigenia*, 486 et seq.; *Wilhelm Meister*, 168, 413, 489 et seq.; *Werther*, 478, 479 et seq.
- GOLIARDIC POETRY, 255.
- GORKY, M., 101.
- GRAND ENCYCLOPEDIA, 468.
- GREEK, his imagination, 18 et seq.; his inheritance, 16; the Greek State, 18; Greek Tragedy, as a spectacle, 63 et seq.; Greek Tragedy, its historical background, 64 et seq.; Greek Tragedy, the theme of, 66 et seq.; Greek Tragedy and Homer, 103.
- GUNPOWDER, discovery of, 301 et seq.
- HARDY, THOS., 535 et seq.
- HAUPTMANN'S, *Weavers*, 6.
- HEBREW, the, 212 et seq.; 521 et seq.; Hebrew Bible, the, 215 et seq.; epic material in, 223 et seq.; ethical interpretation of history, 227 et seq.; poetry in, 216 et seq.; tragic material in, 227; Hebrew ethics, influence of Greek thought on, 229 et seq.; Hebrew literature, influence of the desert on, 214 et seq.; Contrast between the Greek and Hebrew imagination, 35; Hebrew thought and science, 243.
- HEGIRA, the, 249.
- HENRY IV OF FRANCE, 336.
- HOMER, 3, 9, 24, 517 et seq.; and Troy, 21 et seq.; on man, 36 et seq.; heroes, 41 et seq.; heroines, 45; and human nature, 26 et seq.; on old age, 44; on the gods, 32 et seq.; supernatural in, 25 et seq.; and the problem of evil, 37 et seq.; on fate, 38 et seq.; ideas on immortality, 57; philosophy of life, 45 et seq.; optimism, 48 et seq.; *Iliad*, 24 et seq.; the plot of *Iliad*, 28 et seq.; the episodes, 31 et seq.; its old men, 44; *Iliad*, human nature in, 36 et seq.; its heroes, 41 et seq.; its heroines, 45; ideas on fate, 38 et seq.; its philosophy of life, 45 et seq.; problem of evil, 37 et seq.; the supernatural in, 32 et seq.; *Odyssey*, 24 et seq.; the contrast between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, 51 et seq.; geographical background of the *Odyssey*, 54; plot of the *Odyssey*, 52 et seq.; its human character, 57 et seq.; its gods, 56; the character of Ulysses, 59 et seq.; Homer and Aristophanes, 125 et seq.; Homer and The Spirit of Ancient Greece, 49 et seq.; Homer and science, 49 et seq.; Homer and Greek Tragedy, 103.
- IBSEN, *Doll's House*, 6.
- ILIAD, see Homer.
- INDIA, people of, 188 et seq.; effect of Greece upon, 189 et seq.; Indian poetry, love of nature in, 204 et seq.; India epics, simplicity of plot, 205 et seq.; love motive in, 205 et seq.; characters in, 206 et seq.; contrasted with the Greek, 200, 208 et seq.; supernatural in, 207 et seq.
- ISAIAH, 218, 221 et seq.
- ISLAM, its history, 245 et seq.
- JACOB, 224.
- JAMES I, KING, 433.
- JANSENISM, 408 et seq.
- JEREMIAH, 221 et seq.
- JEZEBEL, 228.
- JOB, book of, 232 et seq.; compared with the Greek, 240 et seq.; ethics of, 235 et seq.
- JUVENAL, on the Greek, 16.
- KALIDASA, *Çakuntala*, 209 et seq.; and Shakespeare, 211.
- KAMA, 206.

- KANT, 528.
- KARMA, 198; doctrine of, 191.
- KIFLING, R., 147.
- KORAN, 246 et seq.; its theology, 250 et seq.; ethics in, 251 et seq.; democracy in, 252 et seq.; its determinism, 251 et seq.; its intensity, 248 et seq.
- LA FONTAIGNE, *Contes and Fables*, 406.
- LAZARILLO DE TORMES, 311.
- LEAF, WALTER, 19.
- LEONARDO DA VINCI, 303.
- LEPANTO, battle of, 314.
- LITERATURE, an adventure in life, 12 et seq.; a philosophy of life, 13 et seq.; and value, 11 et seq.
- LITTLE CLAY CART, 6, 209.
- LOCKE, J., 467.
- LONGINUS, on Homer, 51.
- LOUIS XIV, age of, 402 et seq.
- LOVE, *Kama*, Indian doctrine of, 200.
- LUCAN, the *Pharsalia*, 144.
- LUCRETIIUS, 63, 532; *de Rerum Natura*, 178 et seq.
- LUTHER, M., 305, 434.
- MACCABEES, THE, 229.
- MACHIAVELLI, N., 304, 312.
- MAHABHARATA, the, its plot, 193 et seq.; Nala and Damayante Episode, 206; Savitri episode, 206.
- MANLIUS, 181.
- MARCUS AURELIUS, 181, 439 et seq.; the *Meditations*, 181 et seq.; his individualism, 182; ideas on Providence, 183 et seq.; and Lucretius, 183; and Socrates, 183.
- MASSACRE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW, 336.
- MAYA, doctrine of, 191 et seq.
- MEREDITH, G., on comedy, 123, 427 et seq.
- MICHELANGELO, 303.
- MIDDLE AGES, the, character of, 254 et seq.; Chivalry, 265 et seq.; the church, 256 et seq.; romances of, 261 et seq.; Saints in, 257 et seq.; asceticism of, 259 et seq.
- MILTON, J., 3, 5, 527 et seq.; the man, 462 et seq.; his early poems, 435 et seq.; his prose works, 437 et seq.; on art, 453 et seq.; ethics of, 452 et seq.; on immortality, 58; on liberty, 438 et seq.; ideas of the poet, 436 et seq.; and Aeschylus, 460; and Dante, 453; and Plato, 451 et seq.; *Second Defense*, 436; *Corrus*, 435, 452; *Lysidas*, 435 et seq.; *Paradise Lost*, 439 et seq.; theme of, 441 et seq.; plot of, 441 et seq.; cosmogony in, 442 et seq.; allegory in, 443 et seq.; a search for freedom, 449 et seq.; tragedy in, 448 et seq.; figure of Eve, 454 et seq.; character of Satan, 459 et seq.; *Samson Agonistes*, 463 et seq.
- MODERN PROBLEM, THE, 531 et seq.
- MOHAMMED, 245; his conversion, 246 et seq.
- MOLIÈRE, his life, 413 et seq.; his range, 414 et seq.; *Amphitryon*, 413; *L'Avare*, 418 et seq. *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, 415 et seq. *Don Juan*, 416 et seq.; *Femmes Savantes*, 417 et seq.; *Le Malade Imaginaire*, 429 et seq.; *Misanthrope*, 422 et seq.; *Tartuffe*, 419 et seq.; and comedy, 413 et seq.; irony in, 427; and youth, 429 et seq.; and Aristophanes, 430.
- MONTAIGNE, 168, 439, 525; his life, 338 et seq.; his home, 337 et seq.; his reading, 343 et seq.; love of travel, 344 et seq.; the *Essays*, 352 et seq.; *Apology for Raimond Sebonde*, 355; on death, 364 et seq.; on friends, 345 et seq.; on human nature, 353 et seq.; on human reason, 357 et seq.; on love, 366 et seq.; meaning of philosophy, 349 et seq.; on Plutarch, 350; his scepticism, 367 et

- seq.; and science, 357 et seq.; and Cervantes, 352; and Dante, 355; and Rousseau, 471; and Shakespeare, 352; and the age of Louis XIV, 409 et seq.
- MORE, SIR THOMAS, *Utopia*, 304.
- MOSES, 219.
- NALA, see *Mahabharata*.
- NEWTON, I., 167, 467.
- NIRVANA, doctrine of, 191 et seq.
- ODYSSEY, see Homer.
- OMAR KHAYYAM, *Rubaiyat*, 46, 175, 253.
- O'NEILL, E., 101.
- ORIENT, the, 521 et seq.
- PAGANISM, meaning of, 155 et seq.
- PAUL, SAINT, 130, 244 et seq.
- PASCAL, 408; *Pensées*, 410; on human nature, 410 et seq.
- PERCIVAL, romance of, 264.
- PERICLES, 129.
- PLATO and Socrates, 156 et seq.; *Apology*, 159, 163 et seq.; *Crito*, 163 et seq.; the *Phaedrus*, 161; *Phaedo*, 163, 168, 174 et seq.; Description of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, 162; the *Republic*, 33, 171, 234; *Symposium*, 168 et seq.; description of Socrates, 160 et seq.; on Aristophanes, 105 et seq.
- PLUTARCH, 350.
- POLYBIUS, 132.
- POPE, A., *Essay on Man*, 469.
- PORT ROYAL, 408 et seq.
- PRÉCIEUX, the, 407.
- PRINTING, the discovery of, 300 et seq.
- PROPHETS OF THE HEBREWS, the, 217 et seq.
- PURITAN, the, 431; and Anglican, 433 et seq.
- PYTHAGORAS, 156.
- RABELAIS, F., 105, 106.
- RACINE, 99, 426 et seq.; the *Britannicus*, 426 et seq.; irony in, 427.
- RAMAYANA, see Valmiki and Indian Epics.
- RAPHAEL, 303.
- REFORMATION, the, 304 et seq.
- RENAISSANCE, the, the new art, 302 et seq.; new discoveries, 298 et seq.; the new humanism, 307 et seq.; the new languages, 302 et seq.; the new literature, 305 et seq.; the new politics, 303 et seq.; the new science, 306 et seq.
- RENAN, E., 2.
- ROLAND, CHANSON DE, 42.
- ROMANCE, extravagant dangers in, 315 et seq.
- ROME, 520; and Carthage, 136; its growth, 130; early heroic ideals, 128 et seq.; poetic origins of, 135 et seq.; religion of, 130 et seq.; and Troy, 136.
- ROMAN, the, 127 et seq.; Empire, religion in later, 177 et seq.; gods of, 131 et seq.; law, 129.
- ROUSSEAU, J. J., 204, 351, 465, 468, 527 et seq.; *Confessions*, 342, 473 et seq.; anti-intellectualism of, 469 et seq.; love of freedom, 470 et seq.; and Montaigne, 471, 474; on Socrates, 158.
- SAINT-BEUVE, 515.
- SAMUEL, 219.
- SAMSON, 225.
- SANSCRIT, 188.
- SAUL, KING, 225 et seq.;
- SCHILLER, F., and Goethe, 484 et seq.
- SCIENCE, the new, 528, 531 et seq.; triumph of in the 18th century, 467 et seq.
- SENANCOUR, E. DE, 341 et seq.
- SHAKESPEARE, 3, 9, 525 et seq.; his life, 369 et seq.; *As You Like It*, 52, 371 et seq.; *Coriolanus*, 383; *Hamlet*, 83, 380, 385, 392 et seq.; *Lear*, 385, 386 et seq.; *Macbeth*, 394 et seq.; *Merchant of Venice*, 375 et seq.; *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, 371; *Much Ado About*

- Nothing*, 375 et seq.; *Othello*, 375; the *Tempest*, 399 et seq. *Troilus and Cressida*, 389 et seq.; comedy and tragedy, 377 et seq.; Falstaff, 390 et seq.; the history plays, 381 et seq.; irony, 370 et seq.; tragic irony, 375 et seq.; irony in great tragedy, 379 et seq.; moral in, 383 et seq.; the problem drama, 373 et seq.; Shylock and Tartuffe, 376; and Greek Tragedy, 388; the tragic personality, 398 et seq.; and Montaigne, 382; and Racine, 380; and Sophocles, 89.
- SHAW, G. B. 125; *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, 385.
- SHELLEY, P. B., 14, 145.
- SIEGFRIED, 42.
- SINBAD THE SAILOR, 57.
- SMITH, A., 467.
- SOCRATES, 220, 242, 439, 518; the man, 156 et seq.; his description in Plato, 160 et seq.; description of in *Phaedo*, 162, the age of, 157 et seq.; *Apology* of, 159 et seq.; his trial and death, 163 et seq.; his professed agnosticism, 166 et seq.; on immortality, 174 et seq.; on justice, 171 et seq.; on love, 170 et seq.; his method, 166; the search for ideal personality, 173 et seq.; the universality of, 158 et seq.
- SOPHOCLES, 518; the man, 79; the *Ajax*, 80 et seq.; the *Antigone*, 87 et seq.; the *Oedipus Rex*, 82 et seq.; the *Oedipus at Colonus*, 87 et seq.; the *Philoctetes*, 81 et seq.; his theme, 79 et seq.; the moral problem, 90 et seq.; and Aeschylus, 91; and Euripides, 93 et seq.; and Shakespeare, 89.
- SPAIN in the Renaissance, 299 et seq.
- SPENSER, E., *Fairie Queene*, 432.
- STEIN, FRAU VON, and Goethe, 485 et seq.
- STOICISM, 180, 519 et seq.; and christianity, 184 et seq.
- STORM AND STRESS, the, 478.
- TAGORE, R., 197.
- TAINE, H. A., 2.
- TASSO, T., *Jerusalem Delivered*, 315.
- THEOCRITUS, 204.
- THOMAS, SAINT, the *Summa*, 257.
- TOLSTOI, L., 534.
- TRADITION and Evolution, 7 et seq.; and history, 3 et seq.; and human nature, 4 et seq.; in literature, 2 et seq.
- TRAGEDY, place of in literature, 516.
- TRISTRAM, romance of, 263.
- TROY, 20 et seq.; and Homer, 20 et seq.; the story of, 21 et seq.
- THE TUMBLER OF OUR LADY, 260 et seq.
- TYCHO BRAHE, 167.
- ULYSSES, a symbol of the Greek, 60 et seq.
- VALMIKI, 2; *Ramayana*, 5, 42, 186; its plot, 195 et seq.
- VIRGIL, 520 et seq.; the *Eclogues*, 134, 144 et seq.; *Georgics*, 134 et seq.; the *Aeneid*, 128; the plot of, 136 et seq.; romance in, 138 et seq.; character of Aeneas, 149 et seq.; Aeneas and Augustus, 151 et seq.; Virgil and Euripides, 138; and Homer, 138, 141; on immortality, 58; ideas on immortality, 140; in the Middle Ages, 153; pride of empire, 142 et seq.; on religion, 152 et seq.; and tragedy, 141 et seq.; the poet of tragedy, 145 et seq.; on youth, 147 et seq.
- WHITMAN, WALT, 534 et seq.
- WORDSWORTH, 204, 470.
- ZENO, 156.
- ZOLA, E., 533.